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...of the Specter of Horror and the Supernatural



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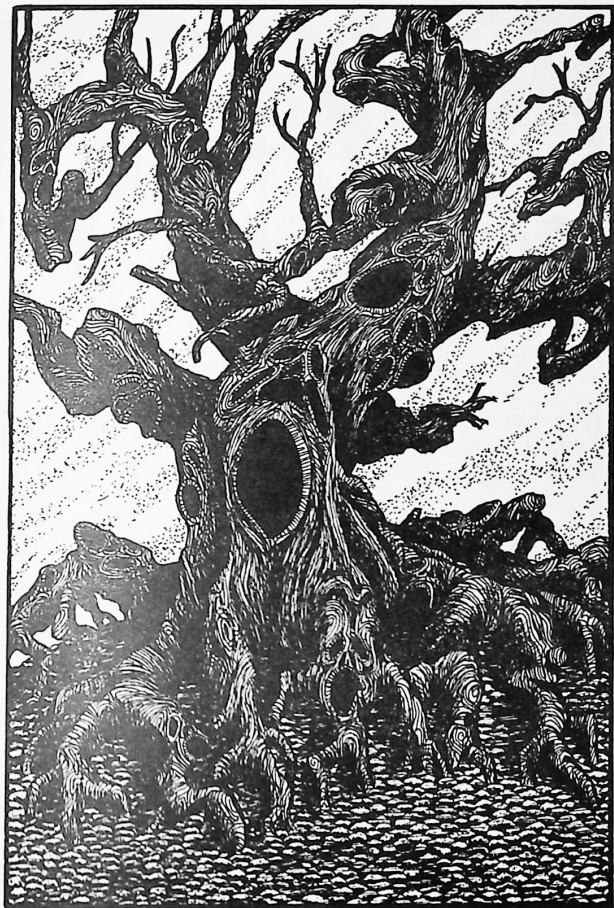


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SARDINHA 84

OCTOBER MEMOIR: Slices of Halloween Night

frost orange
silver and black
chilled shriek of falling night

the moon breaks free of black broom
tendrils
triumphant, yellow pale

mouldy dampness, the smell of clay
crisping, spicy, flesh and dripping
wax

the silent air pressing down
the creaking earth cracking upward

a sudden wind sends
a swirl of leaves around
the shadow trees

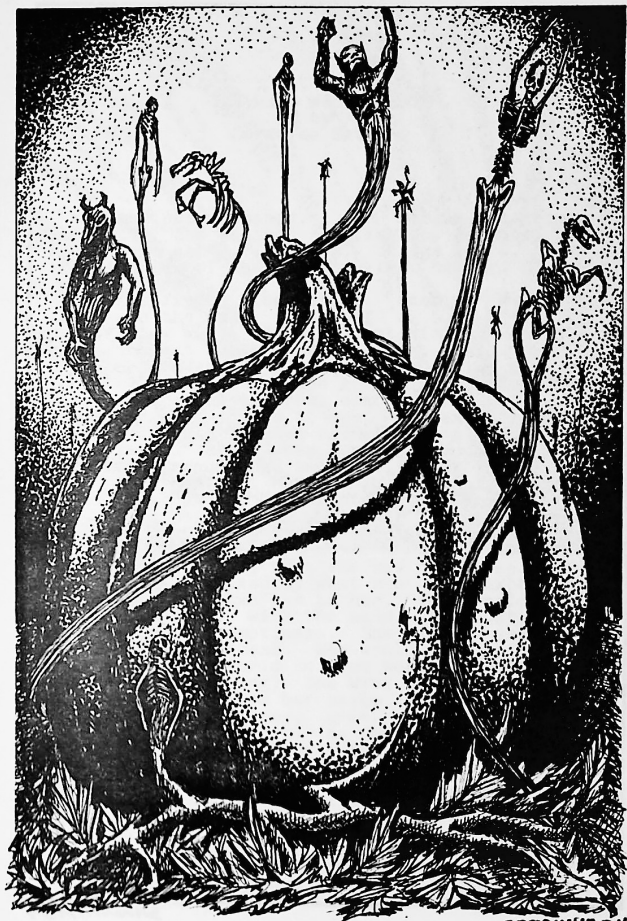
the silence heaves a breathy howl
wisps of chill creep, then fly

white boned visions
wander the sky
lingering through the moon-struck
night

little bites of magic candy
little cries of autumn fear

an endless night of magic time...
a ghostly moment of belief.

Patricia Russo



SARDINHA 84



SARDINHA84

THE WIND WAS SILENT

by

Lorraine Savage

The bus stopped. Its single passenger got out. She was not carrying any baggage; her hands were empty. The only things there, were the memories of what she had left behind. Somewhere. Where?

The figure stood erect, staring serenely ahead as the empty vision of a bus, stirring dust, flew away. The frequent visitor was left alone amongst the the sand. Alone. Again.

She looked ahead. Hands by her side and her long skirt touching the ground were the only hazy features to the real character. Slowly, she moved her head around to see. She was the only visitor to this strange place, her place, that she visited often when her mind troubled her, and her surroundings became altered. Here she could find comfort. Maybe this was a place where she could grow or, maybe stagnate. Most often, it was a dusty place where her thoughts were sprinkled like the grains she kicked up as she stood.

The vision of what she saw had been forseen. It was exactly what she had expected, though little else was to her. This world was always the same, with the sand, the dust, the extent of the emptiness. She had always been afraid of emptiness. Why would she so often leave the Other World to come here where it was open and frightening? The Wind was chilling her again, so she pulled her beige shawl about her.

The always stony, gritty surface of this world lay ready for her as she entered it. She had never known a smooth spot anywhere here. Nothing was smooth or soft. It was the exact opposite of the Other World, where everything was padded and protective. She enjoyed the roughness of this place, just because it was different.

The air about her was gray and hazy. She had never quite been able to see clearly enough. There were always shadows she could not distinguish. The haze and clouds were abundant, except

when the Wind blew. Sometimes when the Wind blew, she could see ahead better. But when the Wind died down, her eyes hurt, for she strained them so often to see.

She looked in front of her. Fear rushed through the lonely figure staring raptly here and there. She knew why she came here, because of the Watchers: people, things, feelings from the Other World. She wanted to be free from Them. But she wasn't totally free. Even here, They watched her. The Wind was not as plentiful as she would have liked.

She hadn't recognized the bus driver. Was he part of it? Was he one of Them? How did she get to this barren, dismal place time after time? Was she a prisoner or a guest? Was this punishment or privilege? She looked again. Her feet were in the way of the flowing dust and sand, flowing perceptions she tried to grasp, but could only follow with her eyes.

The Watchers were always in the Other World, yet were starting to be in this one. If They were to exist here with her, the Wind would die down and become silent. Her frail mind couldn't comprehend how They could be in both worlds, or why They watched her. She could feel Them all around her as she stood.

She shouldn't have done it. She shouldn't have come here again. She was so afraid of being trapped here with Them. She wanted to tap on the sky's walls and get out.

When will the Wind overtake Them? She often tried to find her way to that world that knew no Wind, no dust storms. Yet she feared being trapped here, too. Though afraid, she needed the openness of her world, the Wind, the sandals that fit so comfortably, the shawl that was not white.

She had tried to resist the Watchers from the Other World once. They tried to bring her back to Them, and she wouldn't obey. After having spent almost a week here, she did return to Them. The Watchers didn't understand and caused her mind to hurt more. They would laugh, some grimaced, and she would go back to obeying Them. It was just not her place to disobey Them; They were so often cruel to her only for the reason that her thoughts were scrambled.

She knew she must do what They told her or she would be totally alone. She had been conditioned to be dependent. But she yearned so for the Wind to be her protection so she could leave Them forever.

Again she looked at this place to where she

always went. She turned her head from side to side, moving gravely slow, feeling very alone and banished.

The expanse of this world was very flat and stretched onward with barely recognizeable boundaries. The edges frightened her. The horizon seemed to curve upward as if to cradle her within a great bowl. There was no way for her to know if she stood at the edge, middle, or end of this place. Even here, in all this openness, she felt somehow enclosed. She was lost as well as misplaced. She began to wonder if she deserved the Wind. She hated this darkness, this void. She had always feared the dark and black, and the Watchers knew that. Then why was her world of swirling air so dark and eerie? Why were there shadows? She knew they had a right to test her. There were always tests. And her mind grew tired and restless with Them.

Some days when she was feeling better, feeling the circle of sand settle and the feeling of the Wind quieting down, she would wonder where her world was, who They were, and why she always went to this place. But the days when the dust swirled and the Wind was threatening, she found comfort in this world. Her body would feel no more pain, her mind would wander the lands eternally, never reaching the edges to see what was on the other side.

Yet always was the fear that she would remain here forever. Inside her, the novelty of the Wind's message fought against the stability of the Other World.

Often, amid the fear, she would feel comfort, almost pleasure in this world of the Wind. One night in restraints, she dreamt of the Wind.

This world would always remain silent. No sound was made, but the Wind's. How could she protest if she chose to go back to the world of the Watchers? Her dry lips did not move. She closed her eyes tightly to block out the difficult decision.

But she quickly opened them when she heard the faint sound. She had heard it many times before in this world. She had not forgotten it. It made fear the primary emotion in her. Before she had a chance to get used to the horrid sound of the Wind getting more powerful. It began to approach her. It was enclosing her and the sound seemed so inviting, yet deceiving. She trembled when the Wind tried to dominate her.

Again, she pulled her shawl around her. The long skirt dragged in the dust. Her slim figure held the same position since she got off the

bus. She had never seen the bus before. Would she ever see it again? She supposed not. This place would take her over. She would never return. The Wind would never quiet down in her. She was both scared of the Wind, and entranced by It. It had a way of drawing her to It.

The sound was getting closer as she had dreaded, more fear built inside her. The Watchers had to be here, she thought. Only Their presence could stir up such a fury in the Wind. The clash of Wind and Watchers could destroy this world. If They won, there would no longer be a world ruled by the Wind. But the need for the Wind was essential. The Wind was blowing about her without mercy as she shuddered. The sound kept building and building, getting louder and louder; becoming sinister.

The war continued. No one felt the effects except her mind. She felt like fighting but she could never fight anything that she couldn't understand. That's why this place meant so much to her, and why she knew at last that she'd become part of it.

She was deeply sorry for what she had tried to do although it wasn't a harsh act. Why shouldn't she want to be part of the Wind? Why shouldn't she try to find a world where she felt a citizen rather than a slave? But still, she had made a free act. She had done it on her own. The Watchers would not forgive her for that. That's why They feared the influence of the Wind so much. They would chase her anywhere to get her back where They thought she belonged. She longed to get herself cleared from the crime which was put against her. She did not want to get her dignity so low as to get on her knees and beg her way out. She would not go back to Them.

Yes, she would beg for the Wind's permission to stay here. She would overcome her fear to stay. She had more respect for the Wind than for the Watchers, so she didn't mind begging. She had never tried to communicate with the Wind before and didn't know if It would accept her. She was not used to begging but there was no other choice. Would the Wind be merciful? Could it be compassionate? The haunting sound of the Wind stopped her. She was about to block her ears to stop the sound from penetrating, but her hands stayed at the same position at her side. She dared not move lest she insult the Wind. Time had passed. How much, she could not say. The sound was still there at a single spot but was not as loud. Absolution

must've found its way into the Wind.

The atmosphere was getting light and the darkness was leaving, making room for a faint glow of sunlight. Shadows faded. This was the first time she could see further to the edges of this world. If her eyes were not teasing her, she thought she saw tall greenery reaching high, objects she vaguely remembered from an isolated part of the Other World. The volume of the Wind's sound lowered, but some of her fear of it being there remained hanging suspended in the clear but thick air.

If there was anytime to plead for permission to stay, now was the time. The Wind was less intimidating. The sun tried to break its way through the clouds but it would have to wait for a while. The girl had no choice. The war between the Other World and the Wind could not continue to churn in her mind. She had to make a decision. She was here before the Wind in Its world. Already she could feel the Wind taking control of her as she faced It with a courage she never knew existed in her. She was still confused, yet she enjoyed this new forte.

For the first time since she got off the bus she moved. Her hands came from her sides and were clasped together. She lowered her head and a small silent tear came down from one eye. Another tear came down and soon there was another. Her hands clenched more tightly when she began to speak for the first time. She had never said a word in the Other World, yet here she dared. Her mouth opened.

One word came from it. It was humble yet powerful, being heard throughout all the worlds she had ever known. Her tone was soft. "Please..."

The Watchers ceased Their attacks on the Wind and were stunned by the accomplishment of such a weak and troubled person. She had spoken: The Wind had changed. She could feel Its gentleness about her, Its praise of her. The Wind caressed her, blowing her long skirt and hair, allowing her to see through the remaining shadows.

The worst was over. When she spoke, the Wind had listened. She knew It had. Would she now become a permanent resident of this world of swirling dust, and escaping breezes? She didn't think so. She raised her head now while her tears dried and a mild swirling of the Wind enveloped her.

Now that she and the Wind had become one, she felt that there was yet another world to go

to, one without Watchers, one without darkness and fear, one with greens and blues, not whites. A world where she and the Wind could work together in her mind and become something useful. The Wind was not as terrible as she thought It might be.

Her hands were lowered to her sides once again. As she looked around her in this place, there was silence. The Wind no longer needed to get her attention. She had heard It and It had heard her. The Wind knew how she strove to be free. That was the Wind's purpose. It took time for the the Wind to give her a definite answer. Yet she knew it would come. Its decision was so important to her and she needed to be sure. She waited as if an eternity for the Wind's reply and was left standing in the dust.

She never saw the bus again like she imagined she wouldn't. It was obsolete. Her fear was gone and was replaced by hope, a hope that burned within her. Her soul had never been touched by anything before. But now the Wind had crept into it and had snared it. She wasn't afraid of this new domination. It was what she wanted, and It would be an end to the conflict.

She hoped she would get the decision soon. She would wait for it as the burning intensified and the Wind engulfed her. Her hair blew in her face blinding her to this world while she waited.

Just a figure standing there, waiting, while the Wind was silent...



SARDINHA 84

FAMILY AFFAIR
by
Milton Healy, Jr.

The ad had appeared in the morning's newspaper. As Bailey read it over his coffee and muffin, he knew right off that it was just the ticket.

He had been reading the want ads since graduating from a small community college with a degree in painting. So far, he had met with little success, but was at least able to say he was actively seeking employment each Thursday when he picked up his unemployment check.

The ad read:

Living alone and finding it hard to make ends meet? How does spending the summer at a lovely old inn on a picturesque New England island sound? Free room and board in exchange for light maintenance and some gardening. Send letter and references to:

Mr. and Mrs. E. Akely

P.O. Box 696

Algonquin, ME

Bailey set out to work with an uncharacteristic zeal. First he composed an enthusiastic letter. Professional, yet friendly, it contained a few personal asides explaining his current state of transience, lack of family ties, and association with the arts which made the position the opportunity of a lifetime.

Next, he focused his creative energies on fabricating references. Never developing much of a resume, Bailey's intuition told him that a reference from the Chez Rene Lounge would somehow not suffice. Besides this, he had never gotten on well with his teachers. He would have to rely on his considerable powers of imagination to supply him with the references required.

An executive officer of the local Lion's club wrote glowingly of the young man's fine standing in the community, and the manager of a local department store obliged with a report of his long and successful work record.

Despite the obviously phony references, Bailey was pleasantly surprised to receive a registered letter informing him that the job was his, should he decide to take it. He packed, and was on the ferry to Algonquin the very next day.

From the upper deck, the island appeared to be a verdant expanse of lush elephant grass and scrub pine; girded by rocky crags to the west and a pale white skirt of dune sand to the east. Bailey felt a surge of excitement at the beginning of his island adventure, quite unlike anything he had felt before. He felt sure that his light duties would leave plenty of time for his own pursuits, and the picturesque island would provide ample subject matter for the series of watercolors he had planned. The ship docked. The island yawned, accepting him. A quick walking tour of the island before looking up his new employers seemed to be in order, Bailey decided.

The island was lovely, cooled by the sea breezes; still managing to cling to the last vestiges of tranquility and gray shingled quaintness, despite the annual onslaught of New York advertising executives, nudists, and beer swilling college students. The gently sloping streets of the downtown district were paved with cobblestones where Bailey imagined, the asphalt had been ripped up to give even more credence to the colonial atmosphere.

On either side of the main street, artist studios and craft shops had sprouted in the recent years, like so many spores born to the island on the ill wind of progress.

Still the crass commercialism could not totally destroy the serenity of the old New England seaport. Its enigma was subtly evident, like the haunting lilt of a sea chanty or the scent of ambergris.

Of course there were tourists replete in Bermuda shorts and loud shirts. Some of the more continental sat at white enameled patio furniture outside cafes, enjoying iced tea and dreaming of the south of France.

Bailey walked down to the waterfront where the bars were unpretentious. Places where one could have a beer in dark coolness, rest his elbows on a varnished oak bar and watch gulls drop quahogs on the rocks.

The lure of the sea had him on its hook. Kicking off his shoes, Bailey walked down the pale hot stretch of beach speckled here and there with chalk white shells protruding from the sand, like so many tiny desert skulls.

He didn't walk in complete solitude. Forced

to pick his way among the sharp stones and oil slicked bathing beauties, he thought of how he missed his true vocation as a caricaturist: cellulite thighed ladies basking on towels and bronzed beach boys preening and strutting. Best of all were the shapely sun goddesses, princesses of the upper middle class whose skin would be dry and wrinkly before they reached thirty. He would probably paint some of them.

The quiet sloping road was surrounded on either side by chickweed and patches of slender grass. At the top of the hill stood the inn, solemn and graceful. It had endured for so long that it looked to be a part of the natural landscape.

The gabled colonial was located as far inland as possible. Adjacent to it was a heavily wooded area of almost alien countenance. Not so much due to any trait of the wood itself, but simply that the Breton-like forest seemed to be completely out of place. It was as if colonial shipbuilders and the winter fires of Pilgrim settlers would have long ago decimated the luxurious growth of pine, elm, and poplar. On the other side of the yard stretched a large unkempt hedgerow cutting off the property from the rest of the island. Probably my first job, thought Bailey with a grin.

Bailey mounted the steps, but before he could reach the door, two figures burst upon him, almost knocking him over. The man and woman surrounded him, shaking his hand and pawing at his only piece of luggage with unrestrained exuberance.

"Welcome! Welcome young feller. Glad to see yeh, we be for sure. Hope yeh had a pleasant passage from the mainland."

"Come now, Pa, let the poor boy catch his breath, will yeh? Besides, we haven't even introduced ourselves yet. Fine hosts we turn out to be!" laughed the woman.

"Scuse me, my boy. I'm Elihu Akely. And this here's my wife, Mrs. Akely. No need to introduce yourself. You're Bailey, come to take the job...!"

"We just knew it was you when we saw yeh comin' up the road," interrupted Mrs. Akely. "So strong and confident, like you already knowed the place."

"Yep, I said to Ma here, Ma, that must be that young Bailey boy from the mainland here already. We wasn't 'spectin' yeh till tomorrow."

Bailey finally managed to interject, "I hope I haven't inconvenienced you by coming

early, but I was so excited, I decided not to wait."

"Not at all! Not at all! We're glad to have yeh! Sooner the better!"

"Now let's not stand around in the hot sun all day Pa, The poor boy must be tired and hungry. Come on in child, I'll show you your room. You can freshen up, then we'll give you the twenty five cent tour. How's that?"

"Sounds fine, m'am."

"And I just made a fresh pitcher of lemonade..."

"Not to mention one of her famous rhubarb pies, just pulled from the oven." added Mr. Akely.

After a short tour, during which he was shown around the graceful and simply appointed inn and solemn neglected grounds, Bailey retired to his room early to rest before dinner.

Lying on the soft bed watching its brass footboard glow warmly with the reflection of the sunset, Bailey lay scheming, wondering how long he could milk the situation.

He was shaken from his reverie by a loud motherly voice calling, "Bailey! Bailey boy! Time for supper. Don't diddle daddle. C'mon, get it while it's hot!"

Rising laboriously, Bailey convinced himself that Mrs. Akely was only a kind old lady with an overabundance of maternal hormones. He was sure he'd have her broken in in no time at all.

"Coming Mrs. Akely," he called down. "Just washing my hands."

In the dining room, Bailey found himself in the company of people of a most intriguing nature.

"Bailey, I'd like you to meet our guests. This here..." said Mrs. Akely pointing to a thin old man to the left, "is Captain Daniel Ellison." At his introduction, the captain nodded tersely and returned to his soup.

"Next to Captain Ellison, is Dolores Wagner, and her secretary Trudi Simpson. Miz Wagner is a famous author, but I'll bet you've read her books, so's I don't have to tell yeh that."

"I'm sorry, I haven't." Bailey said. "As a matter of fact, I've had little time for anything other than my painting." He felt that he had covered himself well. He had never heard of the old bag.

Mr. Akely completed the introduction. "To your right there, is Dr. Henri Monet. He's a anthrologist."

"Zat eez anthropologist. Zee study of primitive cultures," contradicted the doctor with a grin that looked like some obscene October pumpkin.

"An' settin' right there next to yeh is m'boy Lonnie. Lonnie, say hello to Bailey."

"Hullo," said Lonnie without looking up.

Captain Ellison pushed himself away from the table and asked, "Is Bailey comin' to the clamboil?"

Everyone at the table shot perturbed looks at the captain, as if he spilled the beans on a surprise party. He shrugged and went back to eating.

The rest of the dinner went pleasantly enough. The main course, he found was most satisfying, and thought it to taste like some sort of pork or chicken dish. Mrs. Wagner explained that they all took turns supplying the black cook, Tobias, with different recipes. Tonight they were dining on a dish she called Cotolette de Cochon a la Marseilles.

The dinner ended, but not before Bailey was subjected to the inevitable: "Tell us all about yourself...", to which he answered succinctly as if he had been born only a few hours before. He had little to relate. No family ties, no girlfriend, nothing to tie him down. He also learned a little about the others.

Captain Ellison was a retired luxury liner captain and president of the island's Yachtmen's Association. Mrs. Wagner was indeed a famous author, a prolific panderer of gothic romances and editor of the Emerald Romance line. She and her secretary had come to the island for the last twenty years, and claimed some of her best works were created here. Lastly, Dr. Monet was a semi-retired anthropologist who busied himself examining the remnants of the original inhabitants of the island. He had spent the better part of his life doing research in New Guinea and New Hebrides, where he had written several treatises on the aboriginal diet. Of all the guests, he was found the most interesting, and yet the most taciturn.

As for Lonnie, he seemed to disprove the old adage of first impressions being deceiving. Throughout dinner, he remained the cretinous lout he had first appeared. His only contribution to dinner was an occasional belch.

Exhausted from the day's excitement, Bailey retired early. Retrieving a flask of bourbon, he poured himself a nightcap and soon he found himself drifting off to, what he felt, was the

best sleep he had had in years.

He dreamed. Bailey had always insisted that he did not dream. Tonight was different. This night, he had an ethereal vision of a beautiful woman. In the dream, she entered his room and flitted about, while he pretended to dose, for in this dream he was paralyzed. He reached for her. The harder he tried, the further away she got, until she was nothing more than a wisp of flame burning in the gaslight.

The next morning, Bailey woke unrested. Hair crusted with dried sweat, the dream played on his mind.

After breakfast, he discovered just what was expected of him. Not much, as it turned out. The garden, overgrown and dilapidated, seemed to be the only thing begging for attention. Hulking Lonnie seemed to have everything else under control. The garden simply required the sensitivity and quality of abstract design he lacked, but that Bailey had in abundance.

Bailey couldn't help question why his presence was required to begin with. Never one to question good fortune, he shrugged it off and put it down to luck.

The morning was hot, and Bailey exhausted himself in the garden early. The summer sun sent visions of ice cold beer dancing mockingly through his head. He would have to settle for the house specialty, lemonade. His employers appeared to be teetotalers, because ever time he went to the fridge, there was always a fresh pitcherful, but little else. Also, there was never anything to pick on: no cold cuts, fried chicken, or left over meat loaf and potato salad. There was a large ice box in the cook's pantry, but it was always locked and appeared to be off limits.

On his way to the kitchen, Bailey stopped to admire a large antique hutch in the parlor. The cupboard contained the usual siamese cat figurines, polished rocks glued together to resemble turtles, trinkets, and photos in gilded frames. There were Mr. and Mrs. Akely smiling beatifically. Next to them was an old grammar school portrait of Lonnie looking somewhat confused and soporific. Most intriguing was a high school graduation picture of a young woman.

Bailey knew he had seen her before, maybe it was just that he wished he had. He stood transfixed.

"Pretty girl, eh Bailey?" He whirled to see Mr. and Mrs. Akely, arm in arm, smiling up at

him.

"Yes. She's beautiful, who is she?"

"Our poor dead daughter, who was taken from us in the springtime of her life," said Mr. Akely in an isolated way.

"She's the girl in my dream." Bailey sank against the sofa.

The old couple looked at each other quizzically, worry furrowing their brows.

"What dream? Tell us about your dream, Bailey."

"Last night, she came to me in a dream. I tried to follow, but it was useless. She disappeared."

Bailey was shocked. For the first time he had been touched and could truly feel. Touched? By what? An elusive dream? By the unhappy coolness of a ghost? He put his hand on Mr. Akely's shoulder. "Tell me about her. Please."

"Her name was Maribelle. She died in a motorcycle accident," stated Mr. Akely. "One of those new fangled screaming demons her boyfriend brought back from the mainland."

"We didn't want her to ride with him," Mrs. Akely added, "But, she always did have a mind of her own. That right, Elihu?"

"That's right, Ma. If that girl got something in her mind, there was just no tellin' her no." He pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his eyes. "Anyhow, there was a terrible accident. They say she was killed instantly."

Mrs. Akely began sobbing softly. She covered her face with her apron. "I'm sorry Bailey. It's still painful."

"Bailey, maybe you saw the picture before without taking notice of it, but your mind's eye did. I reckon that could cause a dream."

"I suppose it's possible." Bailey conceded.

Mr. Akely put his arm around his wife to comfort her, and led her out of the room.

For the rest of the day, Bailey could not free himself from Maribelle. Her cool touch seemed to seduce his imagination.

That night he excused himself from dinner, feigning a headache. The entree that night was Dr. Monet's contribution, and a bit too spicy for Bailey's palate. Whatever happened to rare roast beef, homemade gravy, and oven browned potatoes he found himself wondering.

Retiring early, Bailey hoped to recapture the dream of the night before. He had worked in the garden some, and had Tobias make him a sandwich to take upstairs.

That night the dream repeated itself. Bailey felt a light kiss on his cheek. Barely able to open his eyes, he saw Maribelle hovering over him. Her cascading hair brushed lightly against his skin. He felt her warm breath as she painted him with light kisses.

He was afraid to move, lest he frighten away his nocturnal visitor. It was torture, sweet torture not to be able to reciprocate. He lost himself in the moment, just trying to flow with it, unable to call to her when she left.

The next morning, he laughed at the dream. In the light of day, it seemed ridiculous, and yet he allowed that all dreams fell apart in the morning.

Over the next few nights, Bailey slept but did not dream.

One night he was awakened by a soft nudge on the shoulder. Startled, he opened his eyes and saw Maribelle standing above him.

"What?....," he expelled, sitting up quickly.

"Shhh..." said Maribelle, putting a finger to his lips. "I don't want Ma and Pa to know I'm up here."

"You're alive!"

"Of course, silly. They just told you I was dead so's you couldn't meet me. They try to keep me away from the hired help. Claim they don't trust me."

"But, why?"

"I don't know," she said, flitting about the room, picking up and examining little items from the desk and nightstand. "They just don't want me to grow up, is all. They still think I'm a little girl."

"They're probably afraid some big strong hunk is gonna come an' steal their darlin' daughter away from them."

"I can understand that," said Bailey.

Maribelle was wearing a clinging tube top, faded cut-off shorts, and no shoes.

"I hate them. I wish they was dead. They keep me locked in my room, and I can't have any fun. But, sometimes I get out!" She continued to dance around the room like a pretty ballerina. "You know they're monsters," she said, laying her head on Bailey's shoulder and tracing tiny circles with her finger on his chest.

"You've got to help me run away. I knew you'd come to get me away from them. I dreamed it!"

Bailey had an offer he could not refuse. He

was caught in the hold of an obsession he had no desire to break.

"Where'll we go?" he asked. "We're on an island, remember? We won't be able to get a boat until tomorrow."

"I know a cave in the woods. An old Indian cave no one knows about, 'cept me. We can hide there until tomorrow. Hush up now, an' follow me."

The path through the woods was illuminated by a summer moon. The trees enclosed them, casting oblique shadows. Bailey found himself marvelling at the thickness of the forest, of how it had withstood the onslaught of land developers. Acorns crunched underfoot, and shy animals, disturbed in their nightly romp, scurried before them. The leaves stirred and rustled in the night breeze like silk slips. Soon the path was nonexistent, but Maribelle knew the way with the surety of a wood nymph raised among the brambles and birch bark.

The cave she led him to was hewn into an unexposed side of rock that had been stunted in growth to something less than mountainhood.

In the dark recesses of the cave, Bailey's footfall was met with crunching and scraping sounds. Losing his balance as well as Maribelle's guiding hand, he slipped and fell to the ground, skinning his palms on sharp scattered objects.

There was light. Maribelle had lit an old camper's lantern, exposing the cave to a dull light, and illuminating objects more comfortably left in the dark.

Strewn over the floor of the cave were thousands of broken clam shells, unbleached by the sun they had never been exposed to. A large iron kettle occupied the center of the cave, crusted, pitted, and scratched from years of use. The walls of the cave were covered with haphazard paintings in different styles and applied with different degrees of facility. All were recognizable as the fiendish products of fertile and festering imaginations. A primitive altar, rough hewn and carved out of the cave rock itself, sat in the corner of the cave.

"What is this place?" Bailey finally managed to spit out.

"It's an old Indian cave I found. Great, huh?"

"Kind of weird if you ask me." Bailey continued to look around in amazement. A discordant note reverberated in his subconscious. "But these paintings on the walls, they don't look Indian

to me."

"They ain't. But don't you think they fit?" Maribelle moved over to the drawings, lovingly tracing them with her fingers.

"What do you know about this place?" Bailey inquired.

"Oh, a little. The Indians used to come here to worship their demon gods. They even made human sacrifices!" Maribelle's eyes seemed to brighten with excitement as she finished. "I bet they even ate their victims!" That's what I figure this cauldron was for. Maribelle slid her hand over its rough surface, "Or maybe a real witch used it."

Bailey was still trying to make sense out of these new surroundings. "How did you find out so much?"

She looked at him coyly. "Mostly in bits and pieces. Read a little, talked to the old timers. I even wrote a paper about Indian demon worship in junior high." She stood before him with hand on hip, "My uncle used to tell me all kinds of wicked stories."

"I didn't know Indians were demon worshippers." he said, perplexed.

"They wasn't. Not all of them, anyhow. Only the smart ones!" Maribelle laughed.

Pointing to the pictures on the wall, she said, "See this one? His name is Tsathuaga. Don't he look like the cutest little frog? This one here they called Agathoth or Asteroff, or something. She then pointed to a roughly drawn caricature, made all the more horrible by the obvious delight with which a childish hand had constructed the monstrosity of leathern wings, convulsed claws, and a single yellow eye. "I call him Temaboz, he's my favorite."

"Maribelle, did you make these paintings?"

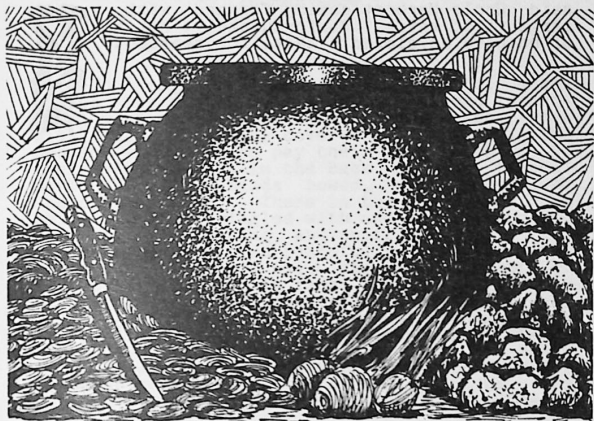
"No. Least wise, not all of them. You're not going to try and stop me like Ma and Pa, are you?" she asked plaintively. "They say it's sacreligious." She looked genuinely upset, like a child whose biggest fear is the loss of her fantasy playmates.

She sat next to Bailey, resting her head on his shoulder. "We can stay here tonight, can't we? I won't be afraid, 'cause I've got you to protect me."

He acquiesced. They shared a candy bar Maribelle had brought, huddled together for warmth, and soon fell asleep.

Bailey woke stiff and sore. His arms were numb, as if they had fallen asleep. He was aware of voices beyond the wall of sleep. Slowly, his

eyes cleared. Maribelle stood in front of him, head downcast, a pouting expression marring her face. Behind her were her parents, each carrying a bushel of clams. Following them, were Captain Ellison, Dr. Monet, and Mrs. Wagner and Trudi holding hands. Tobias brought up the rear, with a sack of potatoes thrown over his shoulder.



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As Bailey tried to get up to protest that it was all his fault, and they should go easy on Maribelle, he was surprised to find himself bound hand and foot.

"I just knew that this was gonna happen. I knew if this little bitch got him in her clutches, she'd bring him here," Mr. Akely growled, his voice rising above the grumbling of the others.

Mrs. Akely had now noticed that Bailey was awake. "Don't you worry, child. We'll get those ropes off you in a jiffy." Her fleshy motherly hand patted his forehead.

Mr. Akely continued. "No hard feelin's, Bailey. We had to tell you that little fib about Maribelle. She's just too much for Mother and me to handle sometimes. She's all the time runnin' off to do things on her own, as if for all the world she didn't have a family who love her."

"Pa, she's just got a lot of spunk, is all. You said so yourself, she's got a mind of her own."

"That's no excuse Ma, and you know it. She's got to learn that these here clamboils are supposed to be a family affair, right Uncle Herbert?"

"Zat eez correct. A family clamboil..." said Uncle Herbert coming forward with a large filet knife. "Unfortunately, not all of us have developed a taste for seafood."



THE MOURNER
by
Thomas Zane

The organ bellowed its sorrowful music across the room, engulfing each person in another wave of sadness. Centered on the front dias, the coffin lay covered with flowers. The people who came to pay their last respects to their friend sat in the back of the funeral parlor, rigid, heads bowed, while the priest ended the litany. There in the silence of the hall, the music mingled with and accentuated the soft crying, coughing, and sniffing.

The man had died peacefully, passing away on a cool summer's eve. The great number of people attending this final service attested to his goodness. Reacting to the sadness and increasing reality of his permanent absence from their lives, many of his friends and family wished for the coffin to suddenly open and their beloved climb out and be with them, once again. Although church going and deeply religious, the people secretly yearned for death to be beaten this one time.

The man laid quietly, hands folded, eyes closed. Cushioned in soft linen and blackness, he felt as if he floated in space. He knew that he had died. Though his consciousness was similar to that of sleeping, the man knew that one life was over and another one just beginning. So it was true. He was patient and serene, after all, time was all he had now. As if underwater, he faintly heard murmurs of what seemed to be voices. The man sighed inwardly, snuggled into his mental hammock, and continued to wait for whatever adventure was next in store.

As the priest sat down, a figure stood up in the back of the room and shuffled slowly towards the dias. He was not in a hurry, indeed, like the dead man, time was on his side. He knew no one would intercede for everyone there wanted what he was about to give.

Hearing the muffled footsteps on the carpet, the wife looked up and saw an old, white-haired gentleman, hunched over with age, several

feet from her husband's casket.

The daughter looked up and saw a handsome, bearded lad about to remove the flowers from her father's coffin.

The grandchild thought it was very funny for a little boy to be up where his grandpa lay in a wooden box.

Suddenly, the dead man was startled out of his serenity. Still in blackness, he was no longer calm. Something was disturbing this after-existence. The man knew that such a feeling should not be felt now. The sense of terror grew and radiated throughout his mind. The man thought that death was the ultimate fear and that he had successfully passed that stage. He was not sure anymore.

The audience watched as the mourner removed the last of the flowers on the casket. In disbelief they saw the old man/young man/child standing next to the casket in the middle of the funeral service. Shocked, each person nudged their neighbor and nodded towards the front of the room.

The priest, incredulous that someone was violating the solemnity of the funeral, began to stand to escort the mourner back to his seat. As he rose, the mourner turned towards the priest and locked eyes with his. In the last moment of the priest's life, he saw in the mourner's lifeless glance what he had devoted his whole life to fighting. He died knowing he had lost the battle.

The mourner turned and faced the audience, hands resting on the lip of the casket. Measured words belied the real truth.

"Dear friends," he murmured, "we have lost a close friend, loved by all, mourned by many. In this time of grief, we think of how unfair death is; how angry we become knowing that such a good man died while others not so deserving live on! How unfair!"

"But friends, it need not be this way! You all want death to be beaten this time... All of you wish for him to rise out of this box of death and be among you once again. And it shall be so!" He raised the lid of coffin.

The dead man's horror was complete. He sensed evil. He knew something vile was about to happen to him, to his being. Something permanent. As a great light exploded on his mind, he acted.

The mourner peered in. The dead man layed still, hands folded across his chest.

Suddenly, the dead man's eyes jerked open.

Rigor mortis lips drew back in a snarl, cracking skin at the corners of the mouth. Arms rigid with death snapped up and hands clawed at the mourner's neck.

Surprised, the mourner grabbed the man's wrists and staggered backwards, trying to break the strangulation hold. As he fell, the corpse was pulled from the coffin. The weight of the body crashed the mourner to the floor, buried beneath the dead man.

The dead man was filled with fear and rage.

"No," his mind screamed. "You shall not have me. I will not live forever!"

Applying all his strength to the dead man's left arm, the mourner tried to break the choke. A loud snap sounded as the bone broke, but the death vise continued. Grunting loudly, he heaved the body off to the right of him and was jerked off balance by the weight. He then turned and snarled, sinking his teeth into the right biceps of the corpse.

The mourner struggled to stand, still weighed down by his adversary. Lifting one of the flower vases, he swung it hard at the corpse and caught the top of the skull with a soft thud. He swung the vase again and again, bashing the head in trying to break the grip. The hands remained locked around his neck.

With increasing urgency, the mourner attempted to loosen himself from the corpse. Straining to pull the hands from his neck, he picked the body up and crashed it over the coffin. The grip held, slowly cutting the air off from him. His frenzied movement became more erratic as the death grip asserted itself.

Panting heavily, the mourner collapsed to the floor. He leaned against the corpse, let loose a deep animal shriek, and vanished. The hands and arms of the dead man dropped to the floor, fingernails broken into pieces.

The people who still lived, lay strewn through the parlor. Those in the front rows had been frozen to death immediately as the duel began.

The dead man was calm again. Peace replaced the fear and anger felt moments before. His soul remained his. He had fought against the intruder and won. He could now return to the waiting and expectation. Inwardly, he smiled and patiently waited.



LONELY IS THE NIGHT

by
R.W. Arruda

Thunder roared and lightning flashed as the wind burst open my bedroom windows. Terrified, I jumped out of bed and ran down the seemingly endless flight of stairs to my father's study.

The room was empty. Father had not yet returned. I leaned back against the doorjamb, panting from a combination of exhaustion and fright. The castle was so huge, and I was so all alone. I hated to be alone; I feared being alone.

As long as I could remember, it had been like this. Left alone until the early hours of the morning while my father was occupied elsewhere. When I was younger it hadn't been so bad, but my thirteenth birthday brought with it a restlessness that resulted in sleepless nights filled with horror.

Walking across the room, I increased the glow from a small reading lamp that sat on the desk. Standing there in that tiny circle of dim yellowish light, I felt safe and content, as if a reading lamp could provide protection against the night.

A slight sound came from outside on the balcony. The heavy curtains were drawn, but flashes of light blazed through them as lightning exploded across the sky.

I could hear the balcony doors open on uncoiled hinges. Slowly the curtains parted and a tall, dark figure stood in the doorway.

"Father! You're home."

"Of course. You were frightened?"

"Yes. Yes, I was. I was more afraid tonight than ever before."

"Don't be frightened, Yuri. I am here now, and everything will be fine."

Effortlessly, he picked up the boy and carried him to his bed. As he secured the boy's windows, he thought of how ironic it was that Yuri should be so frightened. The two young fools he had visited that evening hadn't been afraid, even though they had every right to be. They had been calm and unsuspecting, until it was too late.

He would have to have a talk with Yuri. It was not fitting that the son of Dracula should live in fear of the night.



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THE BOTTLER
by
Patricia Russo

Dusk crept slowly over the land as the traveler came to the inn. He was not too surprised to find the village closed up for the night, streets deserted except for a couple of pigs tussling in the dirt. Dust covered his clothing and the two heavy valises he carried. There had been no rain for too long. The inn, small, unpainted, and old, did not look too grand, but the traveler thought it a perfect place for some rest and perhaps some nourishment.

He rapped sharply on the heavy wooden door, waited a reasonable length of time, and then rapped again. After a moment, he struck the door with more force and shouted, "Open up innkeeper!"

This reluctance to open an inn door was a very bad sign, he thought. There might be rumors of a plague nearby frightening them or robber bands might be in the vicinity. Or perhaps it was simply the tax collector they feared. Whatever the reason, the villagers would be doubly suspicious of a stranger, and close scrutiny was the last thing the traveler wanted.

Finally, he heard the scrape of a bar being lifted and soon after the door creaked open about a handsbreadth. The hard, worried face of the innkeeper peered out at him. "Are you a traveler, sir?" he asked in a curiously flat voice.

"Yes." Then it was the tax collector they were on the watch for.

"Where is your horse, sir?"

"I had to sell it a way back. I have money enough to pay for a room, if that is your worry," he said, and dipped two small gold coins out of his pocket and held them in the strip of light that came from the doorway so that the innkeeper could see their gleam.

The innkeeper opened the door wider and the traveler let him take them. After the innkeeper had examined them, he opened the door fully, nodding to the traveler.

Picking up his bags, the traveler remarked, "In my land, it is the custom to welcome travelers when they stop for rest. Is that not the custom here?"

"Pardon sir, but these are hard times for us. Come in and be welcome, if it please you."

The innkeeper held the door open for him, and as soon as he had stepped over the threshold, closed and barred it again.

His first impression of the inside of the inn was the horrendous smell. The light was dim, illumination coming from a fireplace and a pair of lamps from a table, but he could still make out the bunches of garlic flowers tied over the door, the fireplace, the windows, every opening to the outside. Oh, no, he thought.

A small group of people, mostly old men, sat at the tables nearest the fireplace, talking and drinking. The talk slowed, then stopped as they caught sight of him. He felt their eyes on him, hard, suspicious looks, and bowed to them as if to a noble gathering.

Smiling as confidently as he could bring himself to, he said, "My name is Karl Krasny, and I wish to offer my sincere thanks for your hospitality."

The villagers looked at him and nodded at each other in silence until one old man motioned Krasny over to his table.

"I am Hannes, come drink with us." Krasny bowed again, and leaving his valises near the door, went to take the empty seat directly across from the old man. He smiled at him again, ingratiatingly, for it was obvious that this old Hannes was the leader of the village.

As he seated himself, Krasny noticed that all the others at the table had plates and cutlery in front of them, the plates empty, and each fork lying across each knife, to form a ...

Krasny looked down at the space in front of him. He had no plate, but a knife and fork confronted him, lying innocently parallel to each other. Quickly with the tip of his finger, he flipped the fork over the knife to make his own cutlery cross.

When he looked up, Hannes was smiling at him a bit grimly. "Now, sir, you know why we delayed in opening," he said, his voice thin with age, but his eyes a burning black. "We are

afflicted here."

Krasny swept a quick glance around the table. The villagers were nodding in agreement; several crossed themselves. Oh, no, he thought, shutting his eyes in an involuntary spasm of psychic pain.

Play along with them, he told himself, and leave as soon as possible. "Afflicted?" he said. "I had not heard. There was no talk of it on the road."

"Five dead," Hannes rasped.

"I'm very sorry." Krasny brushed his tongue over his lip. "Forgive me, but was a doctor attending them? Could it be that they simply died of illness?"

"No doctor for miles," a middle aged man on Krasny's left said.

"It was no natural illness," Hannes said. "None felt ill before the day they took to their beds, before the sudden weakness came over them. They could not eat, and their nights were filled with evil dreams. From the first they were pale, but towards the end, their skin was as clear as glass. There was no blood in them."

"Were there," Krasny ventured, "marks?"

"Aye, marks," Hannes answered, his flaming black eyes fixed on Krasny.

"You seem to be well protected here," Krasny said, dropping his gaze from the old man. The faces of the villagers, creased and scarred by age and pain, their bodies twisted and broken by nature and peasantry; their own hidden despair at their decrepitude, slapped at Krasny's senses. He wished for a young healthy face to look at.

"I've placed your bags in your room upstairs, sir. Would you be wanting supper now?", the innkeeper queried.

Krasny politely shook his head, smiling politely. "No, I'm not hungry, thank you innkeeper. I am quite tired though, and I think I will retire to my room." He began to stand, but Hannes waved him back to his seat.

"Drink with us, sir, before you go to bed. Bring him a tankard of ale, Willi."

"Thank you, but I'm really very tired..."

"You will not drink with us?"

Krasny briefly calculated, then bowed to practicality. "Forgive my rudeness. Of course, I would be honored to drink with you."

A couple of surprised smiles flickered over the old men's faces. Krasny figured they had never been treated this politely by someone who could pass as a minor nobleman in their lives.

He was trying to decide how much of this rural excuse for ale he would absolutely have to drink in order to impress the villagers with his good nature when Hannes asked, "How long are you to stop here, young sir?"

"Oh, just a day, I imagine."

"If you could postpone your journey for one day, we could use a strong young man for tomorrow night."

All the converstaion died as abruptly as if it had been sliced off with an axe.

Krasny tapped his fingers along the stem of the tankard. "What do you mean?"

"We are to do it tomorrow." There were a couple of muffled protests on either side of him, but Hannes sharp glances stifled them immediately.

"What are you saying?"

"We are going to rid ourselves of the affliction. We are sure we know its hiding place, and tomorrow night we will put an end to it."

He threw a swift glare around the room. "We are old men here, as you can see. The five who died were our children. Strong young, sons and daughters. We could use a young man's help tomorrow night."

Krasny noticed that his fingers were trembling slightly. "Are you truly serious?"

"We have everything prepared. Hawthorne stakes, holy water, and silver daggers blessed by the priest." Hannes drew back his thick eyebrows together fiercely. "All we need are some strong arms."

Krasny felt terror quivering up from the villagers to fill the air of the dim room. He shut his eyes against the twisted faces on all sides of him, faces twisted more by ignorance, fear, and hatred than by age, disease, and deformity.

"You are mad," he managed to say. You would do this bloody thing...to a body dead and buried, or perhaps to a poor living idiot who sleeps in a cave or the forest?" He stood up, brushing his cutlery cross apart. "Against the law of your land and your church - this priest, he knows what you are planning?"

"Father Freidrich...he doesn't approve," said one villager tentatively.

Hannes struck the table with the flat of his hand, rattling the plates and tankards, and driving apart a pair of crosses. "It will be done! It must be done! We have argued this thing out, and we have decided. There will be no turning back." His eyes silenced the mut-

ters.

"You mistake illness for supernatural evil," Krasny spat back.

"I mistake nothing, I know the signs. I know the truth." Once again he swept the room with his fierce, unanswerable gaze. "I know what must be done."

A moment of strained silence hung suspended between them, then Krasny spun and strode for the door. He threw the bar back amid gasps and the wooden groans of chairs being thrown back in haste.

"I'm going outside. I'll be back in the morning unharmed, I promise you. I challenge any one of you to go with me."

"You are the mad one here, youngster," Hannes said. "We'll find your body in the morning, and we will have another corpse to stake."

"I'll see you in hell first," Krasny said, and pushed open the door. He stepped out as three villagers rushed to close the door and bar it behind him.

Striding off into the moonlight tired, hunger began to nudge at him. Krasny cursed the fate that had brought him to this benighted village out of all the cesspools of Europe.

Shortly before dawn, Karl Krasny dashed through the graying village at top speed, his clothing torn, his mouth full of flying dust.

Collapsing against the inn door, he made the heavy wood shudder from the force of his fists. "Open...Please, open! It's Krasny. Please!"

The door swung open, and catching him as he fell, two men dragged him inside. Gasping, and spitting dirt, Krasny lay on his side, his hand on his chest, as the villagers quickly formed an awed circle around him.

"You were right," Krasny gasped, covering his face with his hands. "You were right, it..it was horrible."

"Did you see it?" asked one man fearfully. Krasny nodded, face hidden.

"Did it..." another man began, but trailed off. Someone lifted him to a half-sitting position and closed his hand around a small glass.

"Drink, sir."

Hannes creaked slowly, to his knees beside Krasny, "Pardon, sir," he muttered, and loosened Krasny's collar. He peered at Krasny's throat and neck, then pulled the shirt open and examined Krasny's chest. "You were not attacked," he said.

"I managed to escape it," Krasny panted, lifting the glass to his lips. His hand shook and he spilled some of the liquid onto his clothing.

"I just...barely...oh, I don't want to remember it." Dropping the glass from his trembling fingers, he again shielded his face in his hands.

"Can you tell us..." Hannes began.

"No, no, please don't make me remember it!"

"All right young sir." Hannes got to his feet. "And don't be frightened. We will end this tonight."

Krasny, looking up, observed that the villagers were not overjoyed at this announcement. "No," he said. "Don't go after it. It's much too dangerous." This drew a mutter of agreement from the circle.

"It must be done. You should be convinced of that by now." Hannes said grimly. "It must be destroyed. Can we leave it to kill us little by little?" He looked around the circle. "Can we?"

"No," someone said after a moment, and several others reluctantly nodded in agreement.

"Then we do what we had planned, tonight, it is agreed?"

"No, wait," Krasny said. "Wait. There may be a better way." He held out his hand to a villager, who took it and helped him to his feet. Krasny brushed weakly at the dirt on his clothes. "Listen, I know a safer way to destroy it than going after it with stakes and silver daggers.

"What are you saying? This is the way it has to be done. And the body decapitated and burned."

"Burned, yes, I agree. But there is a better way to do that." Krasny limped to a chair and sat down. "It is the Bulgarian way."

There was silence for a moment, then a man said thoughtfully, "They should know Hannes, eh?"

"Yes," agreed the circle.

"Can the priest be sent for?" Krasny asked. "He will be needed if it is to work."

"Get him," said Hannes to one of the men standing around Krasny's chair.

"But it isn't light yet," the man protested.

"Take some garlic flowers with you. Now, go!" The man left with several backwards glances.

"Tell us this Bulgar way," Hannes said.

Krasny pulled himself straighter in the chair. "The priest must agree. We will need a holy picture, or object, and his blessing on us."

"A holy picture?"

"Yes. And a large jar or bottle, a strong one with a tight lid. Can you get such a thing? Once day comes, you must gather firewood and kindling for a very large bonfire. Do you have a square in this village away from houses or barns?"

"Yes."

"Good. That is where you should prepare your bonfire."

Hannes crossed his arms ponderously and stared at Krasny. "The bonfire is for the vampire?"

"Yes."

"How will you get it to step in?"

Krasny licked his lips, knowing he must project sincerity and the ability to overcome the people's doubts, and Hannes's sarcasm. "You know of course the powers of the vampire? Of how, at least it is said that it may change its shape to that of a wild animal, or even a formless cloud of dust motes?"

The circle nodded and murmured, and Hannes too, was forced to agree that he had heard such things.

"Well, the Bulgar who told me this, he was a very old man. A warrior respected by all in the land. He swore to me that he had done this himself, many times, and that it had always been successful...I didn't believe then, of course, that he had told me anything but children's tales. But, after tonight..."

"Staking is sure." Hannes said firmly.

"So is this, and safer! Hannes, dear people, think. You won't have to hunt the foul thing down and battle it to the death. Only one person will have to get near it, and I will take that duty unto myself in apology for doubting you tonight."

"And if this Bulgar method does not rid us of this fiend?"

"Then you have lost nothing, and I have lost my pride." Krasny lifted his arms in appeal. "I believe I can spare you much trouble and great danger."

"You haven't explained yet, sir," politeness bordering narrowly on the caustic, "what it is you want to do."

Hannes, Krasny thought, had to be treated carefully. He must not be allowed to feel

pushed aside, his place as village elder usurped, or he could very well become dangerous, sabotaging the plan for his pride.

"When the priest comes, then I'll tell it to all of you. Of course, Hannes, you must help me. I will need your wisdom and experience to give me the courage to...to..." Krasny took a shaky breath. "To destroy this abomination. Will you help me, Hannes?"

The villagers, silent waited for Hannes' word. Krasny knew if he refused, his plan was as good as finished.

"I will young sir," Hannes said after a moment.

The villagers grinned in relief, and Krasny clasped the old man's hand. "Thank you, sir. I swear to do my best to relieve your people."

It had taken just a short discussion to convince Father Friedrich that Krasny's method, though smacking uncomfortably of magic, would be far less objectionable than a moonlight staking. The priest readily supplied the traveler with all that he had asked for.

Just as the sun squeezed up over the mountains, Krasny retired to his room, explaining he would need the entire day to prepare for the night's coming activity, making it clear that he was not to be disturbed, not even for meals.

Father Friedrich arrived at the inn as the sun was setting. Krasny explained that it would be more effective if he as a priest, would hold the holy objects while Krasny tried to trap the vampire and as Krasny had hoped, he had grabbed at the opportunity to lead his flock against their enemy in the presence of the entire village.

The half dozen villagers selected by Hannes to assist him gathered at the inn after checking the supplies of firewood stacked in the square. Hannes and Friedrich stood together at the foot of the stairs, waiting for Krasny to appear. They were silent, after long talks throughout the day. Behind them, the men were also subdued.

"Do you think," Friedrich ventured, "he is to be trusted?"

Hannes lifted his shoulders, "We must wait to discover that. I truly hope so."

"What he explained, I still say it sounds like pagan spells," Friedrich muttered again.

"Would he need your help for a pagan spell?" Hannes asked wearily, then looked up as

he heard a door open upstairs. "I think he's coming. Is everything ready?"

Affirmative replies came from the group of men behind them.

Krasny appeared at the top of the stairs, the sturdy glass jar a village woman had provided in his hands. Dressed in dark travelling clothes and high leather boots, he looked a bit different than he had the night before. It was probably the light and the angle that made him look taller, thicker in the chest, and more somber in expression. No, Hannes thought, perhaps that last wasn't an illusion. The young traveler of the previous night now seemed almost a solemn lord.

"He looks older," whispered Friedrich.

Krasny stepped down the worn stairs with a deliberate tread, calculating each movement to inspire assurance in his audience. Hearing the priest's whisper, he felt his own self-confidence grow. He was going to pull it off.

"Is everything prepared," he asked softly.

"Yes sir, just as you said," Hannes answered. Krasny thought he heard a tinge of respect in the man's tone. He hoped he was right. Hannes, the most important person to have on his side, had to be ready to believe in his magic. If Hannes believed, even Father Friedrich would follow.

"The relics?" He turned to the priest.

Friedrich held out his hands. "In the lid of the jar I have affixed a fragment of the forefinger of St. Hewald the Dark. Is that sufficient?"

"Certainly, Father. Even a speck of dust from the holy martyr's shoe would be more than enough to contain this evil. And the other?"

Friedrich held it up for all to see. "It is a vial of blood, brought back at great risk and hardship from the holy land, of the first martyr, St. Stephen. Sir, have you ever seen the like?"

"How very appropriate," Krasny muttered very softly. "No, Father, I admit I have never seen the blood of St. Stephen. It must be the envy of all the churches for miles. I see that it is very valuable ... brought back by a Crusader, no doubt. We must be very careful with it, by all means."

Looking again to Hannes, he asked, "The wood for the fire?"

"It has been gathered. It's at the square now."

"Have you all been confessed and blessed by

Father Friedrich?"

"All but you," Hannes said.

Krasny let himself smile. "But I cannot be protected, Hannes. It must be able to approach me, or how else can I capture it?"

Turning very serious, Krasny said, "Then there's one thing left to do." He walked through the group of villagers to a table and set the jar down carefully. "Hannes, it will be your decision, as eldest of the village."

"What am I to decide?"

Krasny ran his hand along the rim of the jar. "We need one more thing, of course, as you have probably realized. We have the trap. Now we need the bait."

Friedrich touched Hannes's arm. "What does he..."

"I see," said Hannes. "Father, please. He is right." Looking up and down his group of men, he nodded. "You, Wolfram. You're the youngest."

"Now wait," Friedrich objected. "Wouldn't an animal do?"

"It might," Krasny said. "But this bait is better. I promise no real harm will come to you Wolfram. Have you ever been bled?"

"Bled?" Wolfram cast around anxiously for some support from his fellows. "No sir, and I don't want to be now."

"It won't hurt," Hannes cajoled.

"Yes, it will," Krasny said. "A little. And you'll feel a little weak or dizzy afterwards. But, we need you Wolfram." Krasny showed him the short bladed knife he had taken from his belt. "I will hurt you as little as I can."

"Catch a pig," Friedrich protested.

"No," said Hannes. "The young sir is right. This is better bait. Wolfram, the honor, or the shame, is yours. Decide."

The young man swallowed several times, his eyes fixed to the ground. The men around him were silent, daring neither to encourage nor dissuade him.

"Time is short," Krasny said gently.

"What do you want me to do?" Wolfram muttered finally.

"Come over here and sit by the fire. It'll be over in a minute." Krasny pulled out the bench for him, and settled the young man on it. Silently, he motioned for Hannes to come stand behind the bench. The rest of the men approached as well, in mixed apprehension and curiosity.

Holding Wolfram's arm over the jar, Krasny

made a quick incision in the young man's forearm. Wolfram winced, but did not try to pull away when he saw the spurting of blood from his arm rapidly covering the bottom of the jar, he grew fearful and protested.

Hannes grasped the young man's shoulders from behind, keeping him seated. "You sit there until he tells you to get up."

"But Hannes! All that blood."

"It won't hurt you, Wolfram, I promise," Krasny said, his grip tight on Wolfram's wrist. "It looks like it's more than it is." The swiftness of the flow was what was really disturbing him, Krasny knew. "It'll be over in a moment, I promise." The jar was about a third full when Krasny took Wolfram's arm off the rim and pressed his hand over the wound. "Would someone get me a clean cloth, and bring Wolfram some wine?" He was obeyed immediately.

After attending to Wolfram, Krasny suggested, "You had better rest now. Drink some more wine, if you like, and eat something."

Wolfram shook his head. "I want to see what's going to happen." He looked at the bandaged arm. "I have the right."

"I suppose you do," Krasny said. He picked up the jar. "All right my friends, it's time."

"Come, then," said Hannes, and led the group of villagers as they followed Krasny out of the inn and through the empty streets into the square.

"Light the fire," Krasny commanded as he came toward the mass of people. Nearly the whole village was gathered at the square, and those standing by with torches for this order thrust them into the stack of wood. The bonfire was quickly ablaze.

The lurid light from the high burning fire changed the mass of people from a friendly neighborhood gathering to a mob awaiting a satanically flavored spectacle. Krasny now, was no longer a young lord, or even a friendly traveler, but a flame-licked figure of power and danger.

Friedrich took his position at one side of the square as Krasny placed the jar down where it was clearly illuminated by the fire. "Everyone, please be quite now," he said, and an obedient, almost awed hush dropped over the crowd. Some glanced nervously at Hannes, and found comfort in his steadiness as he watched the proceedings fixedly, outwardly unmoved. Krasny noticed approvingly, he needed that calm as much as he would soon need hysteria. Hannes,

he hoped would not get swept up in it.

Standing just behind the jar, Krasny lifted his arms in a gesture of invocation and began to chant.

"Is it Latin?" a man whispered.

"No," said Friedrich.

"Perhaps it is Bulgarian," suggested a woman, and, finding that plausible, the crowd was satisfied.

Krasny began to sway as his chants got louder and more insistent, quickly transforming themselves into shouts. He started to run slowly around the bonfire, the shouted words keeping time with the thump of his boots. Suddenly he whirled and pointed at Friedrich. "Quick! Block the east!"

A deadly cold wind swirled down through the crowd as Friedrich held up the vial and began to pray. The fire changed coloration, from red to blue to yellow then to a shocking green that caused many of the spectators to fall into prayer with Friedrich.

The wind swept through them again, and a woman gasped, "It's here! It's here, it's here!"

"Quickly, the holy water, Father! Seal off the east."

Friedrich hastily obeyed, the crowd watching in amazement as a wind blown cloud of dust, barely visible in the firelight, was stopped dead at the eastern border of the square as if by a wall.

"It's here," a man moaned. "It's come without its body. It is the vampire!"

The dust cloud seem to retreat and swirl closer to the fire. Krasny circled it cautiously, chanting and shouting without pause. The flames threw flecks of color into the dust cloud, making it soon visible to every villager.

Krasny spared a glance from the cloud and cried, "Now, Father, the south!" With the vial of blood from the holy martyr St. Stephen held out before him as a shield, Friedrich blessed the ground along the southern edge of the square.

As if in response to this, the dust cloud shot up into the air, twirling madly. The people closest to it shrank back, some crying out. The frigid wind tore through them again, and Krasny's shouts seemed to be rising in pitch to screams.

"The west! The west!"

The dust cloud was furiously agitated now, pulsing like a frantic heart. The fire flamed

upward, turning a brilliant yellow from the tip of the highest flame to the burning wood at its base.

"The north!" Krasny shrieked, and several men and women shrieked with him. The dust cloud was now about the height of a tall man, shimmering and twisting around the square. Slowly, strips of dust motes seemed to be separating from the main body, forming appendages that too closely resembled arms and legs.

Now it seemed to become suddenly aware of the jar, and of what was in it. Approaching it in swooping circles, the shuddering dust seemed to be playing feint and retreat. Krasny took a step backward to allow it to come closer to the jar.

"Now, Father, take care. When I call for you, you must be swift," he said as he went into a low crouch.

The dust cloud was hesitating, darting rapidly at the jar, then jerking back just as quickly. As Krasny's fingertips touched the ground, the dust cloud made its move, diving in a twisting shimmer into the jar.

Krasny leaped and reached the jar just as the dust cloud entered it. The crowd shouted in fear as the fire died as if doused with a sudden blast of water. In the darkness, screams came from every part of the square.

After a moment, Krasny's voice could be heard, shouting for Friedrich. "The lid, Father! Quickly, hurry!"

Stumbling in the darkness, Friedrich found Krasny, and with his hand guiding him, fastened the lid tightly onto the jar.

"Bring light!" Krasny called, still crouching over the jar. He wiped his face on his sleeve, and sighed. "Hurry people, we've not finished. Light the fire!"

Waiting tensely for the runners to come back with torches, the crowd muttered and groaned. Krasny thought he heard sobs. When the fire was finally relit and the square was once again illuminated, he could see the looks of terror and hope on the villagers' faces.

He lifted the jar over his head so everyone could see it. He was rewarded with gasps. The blood that had been slowly coagulating inside was gone, leaving only a browning stain around the inside of the jar. But what had caused the gasps was what had replaced it. An ugly black shape of tormented smoke struggled to press its insubstantial form away from the relic affixed to the inside of the jar's lid.

"Here is your fiend!" Krasny shouted, and the crowd roared in a relieved rush of joy. "You will be rid of it forever." With a cry of release, he heaved the jar into the bonfire. A piercing scream of rage and agony from the center of the fire resounded through the night, and the crowd, finally free of all its fear, cheered madly. The flames leapt to the sky as the jar burst and its contents were consumed.

"Is it dead?" Hannes shouted.

"Yes."

A second wave of cheers burst from the crowd. "Krasny, Krasny!" they cried, and ran out into the square surrounding him, grabbing at his hands, straining to touch him. "Krasny, Krasny!" It was a chant, a hosanna. He let them exult, smiling and pressing hands all around.

The impromptu celebration had quickly transferred itself to the inn, now a blazing beacon of joy in the peaceful night. Krasny, toasted and cheered and squeezed over and over again, protested very little. In the midst of the revelry, Hannes and Friedrich drew him over to a table near the fireplace and showed him a small heap of silver and copper coins.

"For you," Hannes said.

"No Hannes, I can't take it."

"Please take it sir. It is all we have to give."

"I am not deserving of this, believe me. "Why not....," as he glanced at Friedrich, "Why not give this money to the truly worthy. Perhaps Father Friedrich has a suggestion?"

It turned out that Friedrich did indeed have a suggestion, and as he and Hannes were discussing it, Krasny made his way through the milling people to Willi, the inkeeper. "Would you help me bring my bags down, please?"

The man was surprised. "What do you mean, sir? You're not leaving, now?"

"Yes, I am. I have urgent business in the north, and I've already lost a day's travel."

"But, it is still dark."

"It'll be light soon enough. Come on, Willi." Unnoticed by the villagers now stupified with celebration, Krasny carried one bag down the stairs, Willi following him with the other.

"Thank you," he said, taking the other valise and struck out for a particular spot on the outskirts of the village.

The sky was graying with the first signs of the sun's rise when he arrived. His acquaintance was already there, waiting for him.

"Hello, Krasny," he said a little fearfully.

"You are a damned imbecile," Krasny replied. "I mean that quite sincerely. The only intelligent thing you did in this whole situation was to confess to me yesterday."

"Did you..."

"Yes, damn you, I fixed it. Don't you dare have the audacity to thank me. I did it much more for myself than for you." Krasny shook his head in disgust.

"I...I'm sorry, Krasny."

"Shut up and pay attention. You are not to go near that village for at least six months. No, make that eight."

"But..."

"Shut up you idiot. It's entirely your own fault for drinking from the same few youngsters. Five of them! Five deaths in a village that small. What did you think would happen?" His voice was harsh with scorn. "Anyone who would be as stupid as you deserves to be staked."

"I'm sorry."

Picking up his valises heavy with their load of soil from his birthplace, Krasny softened a bit towards his associate. He was, after all Krasny thought, very young. "It's nearly day" he said. "You may go. Remember to be more cautious in the future."

With occasional glances at the threatening sky, Krasny and his cohort left their meeting place, each going their own way, to seek shelter against the day.



MACHINA EX
by
Sam Gafford

He wanted to write something brilliant. Something so perfect, so powerful in its message that no one would dare reject it. A piece that would say everything he had always been unable to, a meaning that would reach everyone no matter who. Something that he could hold up proudly and say, "I wrote this and it's the best damn thing I've ever done in my life."

Something, anything, that he could look at and know that it was a piece that would satisfy the infernal demon within him that drove him to sit down every night and try to write something of merit. He ached for it. He prayed for it every time his fingers touched the keys on his machine. He thirsted for it with each fiber that made up his miserable existence. But it was always denied him.

He kept trying. Struggling through inane plots, and unsatisfying endings; not daring to hope that maybe this would be the time that it would happen. Maybe, just maybe, the magic would come this night. Only a few times in his life had he felt the strange, glorious thrill that the magic brought. Sitting, he would be hit with a sudden inspiration that lit his brain afire with a brilliance, only to have it fade in the short journey from head to pen; losing any vitality it might of had. Disappointment always left him even more drained of hope and confidence.

He wanted to quit more than anything, he wanted to stop; but he couldn't. There was something pushing inside of him. Some inner force or gremlin that made him want to write, he needed to produce something. It ached in him like a large burning hole in his soul. And he couldn't stop. He had to keep trying. He couldn't quit, but he couldn't succeed either.

Nothing ever came. The valued prize forever eluded his eager grasp. He wrote short stories, abortive attempts at "revolutionary" novels,

articles, anything that had the supreme sadism to enter his head and demand to be written. None of it was any good.

The ideas would be tremendous, leaping from his brain in anxious desire to be written, but everything was trite. Every piece he wrote, every thought behind them, was wrong. It missed something vitally important. It lacked that something needed to come alive, to be the masterpiece that he lived and dreamed. He knew that, but could never find out what it was. Whenever he thought he had it, it fluttered away, laughing with spite at his feeble attempts. It always eluded him.

Why?? Why was this one thing, this one ability he wanted so much denied to him? Why did everything he dared to send out come back from magazines with the ever cheerful rejection slips? And why couldn't he write something he could be proud of?

After what seemed an eternity of disappointment, disillusionment, and rejection, he threw his typewriter out the window. It was a stupid gesture, he knew that. He realized that the problem wasn't with the machine, but himself, and that his destructive tantrum wouldn't help. It did make him feel better. He felt that at least he had done something about it, and that he wasn't just sitting there. For a while at least, it made him calmer than he had been since he started writing.

Whatever possessed him to think that he had any talent at all? How could he have been so foolish? He should have stayed as he was, an employed man who occasionally wrote to please himself, instead of being a fool who tried to make a living by writing. Now he had to force himself to write every day, and all he got for it was garbage. Not even worthy of the life of the tree who died to make the paper. Before, he had managed a modicum of expertise, but now he couldn't write anything he deemed worthy.

He tried to make due with a pen afterwards, but he needed a typewriter if anything he wrote stood a chance of being accepted. He had to get another, and had almost no money. Bills piled up and were eating mercilessly away at his meager savings. Maybe he should have listened when everyone told him to stick with his well paying job, and write in his spare time. But he wanted to write, he needed to write, so he decided to try and see if he could really become a writer.

So far, he failed miserably. No one was interested in anything he wrote. He knew what

the rejections would say, "... the style was too weak and the topic too recognizable to warrant the length. Sorry to say that it doesn't meet our needs at the present time..." with of course, a generous subscription offer. If he ever harbored even a hope of succeeding, of getting that perfect story he had to have a typewriter to write it on. He knew no editor would look twice at a handwritten manuscript, not seriously anyway. He had to get a new machine.

The next day was spent looking at the fancy machines in the bustling department store. He told himself that he might be able to buy one and needed to see what was available. But he knew that he was just escaping from the taunting vision of the blank page waiting at home. Of course, he didn't buy a new model, he couldn't afford it. Besides, a typewriter wasn't edible.

He wound up at the pawn shop. It was small, dirty, and far away from the clean, tidy mall. It was depressing, and it fit his mood perfectly. The walls were hung with musical instruments that looked older than time, aged unreadable books, lamps, statues, chairs with large gaping holes in their seats, televisions that looked like they could only receive old Milton Berle shows, and aisles upon aisles of neglected uncared for junk. He felt right at home, as if he had come to pawn himself.

The owner was also old, and had an air of decay about him. He hesitated for a moment when he tried to ask the owner for what he wanted. Maybe he should wise up, leave now, and try to get another responsible job. Too late. His mouth raced ahead of his brain and asked anyway.

The owner looked up from his record book to stare, then muttered noncommittedly, and led him down one of the side aisles. He wondered what, if anything, the owner might have, and if it was worth buying.

He saw it standing on top of some old crates, the bright metal of the carriage glinting in the dim light. It was old, but he couldn't tell how old. The body was entirely black, but not from dirt.

It was one of those old Clipper manuals and appeared to be in good shape for its age. The keys were all there, with their symbols bright and shiny on the tabs, and they all worked when tried. The carriage creaked somewhat, sounding unnatural in the still air of the shop, but it moved well enough. It was functional, willing, and cheap enough. But something bothered him. It didn't look right somehow, or perhaps it was the

poor lighting in the shop. The machine seemed strange in a way, but just how, he couldn't explain. He fancied that it was looking at him as well, testing his buttons and functions, considering him for purchase. He shrugged it off, it was merely his imaginative fancies starting up again. He'd have to watch himself or else he'd be getting more story ideas that he couldn't realize in print.

The deal was made, the amount paid, and the item bundled for carrying. On the way home, he wondered if he couldn't have bought a gun instead, to finally finish it. He tried to steel himself against the devil of despair, feeling his resolve tumbling away whenever he tried to write. Maybe this new typewriter would make the difference, maybe he just needed something new, and maybe bats gave free rides in hell.

He set it down in the same place where the other one had laid, on top of the old school desk his mother had bought him when he was a child. He had done all his work there: school essays, test preparations, college applications with the eternal requests for admission that were always denied, and that final creature of damnation, that imp of the perverse - the desire to write. Here it had possessed him, willingly at first but slavishly after. This was it's temple.

It looked as if it belonged there, presiding over the room. He didn't realize how much he had missed the presence of the traditional writer's friend. Just seeing it made him feel better somehow, as if maybe he could forget all his past failures and start anew. It promised hope for the future by it's newness to him, and he needed such encouragement.

He had been given good words before, but he could never believe their sincerity, and the bad words only amplified his insecurity. But perhaps this new machine could inspire him. Just the sight of it seemed to be making him more confident, maybe there was something in its black uniform covering. The memory of his past failures seemed more distant now, as if they had belonged to another person a long, long time ago. His hands felt tingling and alive. Suddenly the notion crept up on him that he wanted to write.

For the first time in what seemed an eternity, he actually felt like writing. He didn't have anything to do at the moment, he had even planned on watching television to avoid the frustration of forced writing. But now, he really

wanted to write, to create something regardless of whether he might be able to sell it, just to make something out of nothing!

Grabbing the nearby pad of typing paper, he brushed off the thin film of dust that had accumulated there, and sat down to write. He rolled the first page into the machine and sat, fingers poised to begin, but to start what? He hadn't had a good idea in weeks, and his old ones had tarnished with the passage of time. Feeling a surge of confidence and defiance, he decided he'd write anyway, anything that came to mind.

He started to type. Tentatively at first, then more assured, then in a white hot blaze of creativity that he had never known before. Words flew onto the page, one after the other, in coherent sensible tones.

Characters and scenes almost created themselves, situations were cast, dialogue grew... The thing lived! He could hardly believe his eyes as page after page filled with material, and some of the best material he had ever written at that.

His fingers flew over the keys, almost becoming a blur to his eyes; they seemed to know instinctively what to write. His mind couldn't fully recognize the words being typed, the transition from thought to page became almost instantaneous. He was amazed at what was happening. What had changed? He couldn't understand. Maybe the purchase of the new typewriter had helped his writer's block. Whatever the case, it wasn't something he was going to worry about. This was something to enjoy.

He just kept going. The fingers kept typing, the words kept appearing, and the pages kept multiplying. The stack grew and grew. He dared not stop, he was finally creating what he had been meant to do, and feared that if he stopped he could never do it again.

After fifty two pages of typed and double spaced pages, he had finished the first story he had written in over a month. It turned out to be a ghost story, surprising in the fact that he had never had any interest in the genre. Never had he felt so good about anything he had written before. It was a masterpiece. He knew it and there was no sense in being modest about it. It was a story about a man being terrorized by a ghost from the future, and while the premise was loose, the treatment was brilliant. The prose evoked an atmosphere of horror and fear, coming to a climactic confrontation that exploded from

the sheets. He could scarcely believe he wrote it.

Had he not sat there himself, and watched his fingers move, and knew that it was his story, he would have thought it some long neglected classic. He ached to linger over the script like a new father, to analyze and delight in the mastery of the language, to swim in the ecstatic knowledge that he finally did it after all. But his fingers itched to start again. The desire to create even more was overwhelming in its force and undeniable. He had to do more before he lost it, before this beautiful skill vanished, never to return.

He started again. And it was the same way. The story appeared as if from nowhere and amazed him in its complexity and ingenuity.

It was a vampire story this time, but different from the rest. It had a personality, a definite trait to mark it separate and an instant classic amongst the genre's fans. He didn't care about the horrific element of the piece, or the graphic violence in a few sections. It was just enough to create the feeling, but not enough to disgust too much. Just the fact that he was writing something worthy of his intentions satisfied him.

On he went, typing through the night.

Hours passed swiftly with the sound of keys pressing on paper echoing through his house. Pages were filled with hundreds of words that seemed never to end.

The second story was finished and he started another immediately. He searched for more paper when his formerly immense pile of blank pages ran out, settling for the unused sides of letters. His eyes grew heavier, but he kept going. Sores and blisters appeared on his fingertips and opened to release blood. He couldn't stop. At some point he fell asleep sitting up and awoke several hours later to find the third story finished and the first page of another already begun in the typewriter.

His body was exhausted and craved rest, while his mind reeled joyously at his wonderful fortune. If he could live without rest or food, he would never stop.

He had trouble sleeping that night, feeling as though a terrible weight had been lifted from him and fearing that when he would look again at his writing tomorrow, his genius would become dreck again.

He awoke late the next day. He hesitated looking at the manuscripts, fearful of what he

might find. But even as he sat in his chair, thoughtfully sipping his juice, he could feel the pages presence. They called to him, filling his mind with impressions of last night, tantalizing him with their remembered power. He knew they were up there, waiting to be read and appraised.

Not able to resist any longer, he was no longer satisfied with the dream of the night before. Reality demanded reading. He hoped he hadn't imagined that everything that happened.

He picked up the pages, neatly piled by the sparkling typewriter, and began reading. Skeptical at first, he believed it to be another false spurt, but he couldn't deny what he saw.

Everything was as he remembered.

There was no mistaking the style, they were perfect in every way. The words moved and lived, they leapt from the pages, striking the reader with their unforgettable power and strangling anyone's attention.

It was unbelievable! Never had he written like this before. Every line, each paragraph, sparkled with a life of its own. They jumped over the sheet, teasing, cajoling, tantalizing, laughing with a secret knowledge kept hidden. Beneath the thin veneer of language, ran that unknown ingredient that he had searched for so long, that vital emotion that made stories masterpieces: life. They were everything he had always wanted them to be and more.

There was nothing to correct. No rewriting was required and he feared removing or retouching any single part of them lest it destroy the wonderful rythm and power of the pieces.

Vainly trying to conceal his excitement, he grabbed a few empty envelopes and started thinking where to send them. Grinning, he addressed one to a magazine that had always rejected his work with a curt letter. This one they wouldn't dare send back.

He chuckled like a gnome about his work. This one would go here. This one would go there. He wished that he could see the face of that prudish editor when she read the bloodsucking scene in that story! And this one would go to that magazine that was living off the fact that it had once been an award winning publication, and would be again with this story. It was glorious! For the first time he was sending out work that he knew wouldn't return in dark defeat with their tails between their legs. They were too good to reject.

When he returned from mailing the enve-

lopes, he had a large lunch, and thought about doing some more work. He was frightened by the idea.

He stood outside the room, gazing at the black sentinel. It stood quietly on the desk gleaming in the light. Silent and serene, it seemed poised for action. He wanted to start writing again, but held back slightly. It was almost as if some nameless thing was drawing him to the machine, some unconquerable urge to begin again. It pulled at him, bringing him closer to the machine, and he smiled as he thought he recognized the eternal thirst to write.

He chuckled as he sat down in his chair, knowing full well that his apprehensions were for naught. He could feel the power cursing through his veins, throbbing repeatedly at his fingertips, almost pushing them down on the keys. He started again, and it was better than before.

The same intensive flow of creativity passed through him, but this time it was greater than before. It was stronger now, almost enslaving him in its power, and greater in its scope.

His hands flew over the keyboard, and an incredible tableau began to take place. It was a narrative of some kind, complex and highly intelligent but utterly demented. He estimated its length to be 70 pages, but that didn't stop him. It grew in complexity, length, and madness.

It was told in the first person and detailed events in the London of 1888. The piece felt almost as if it were writing itself, as if he were nothing more than a human machine required to give it voice. The situations developed as if by witchery, the lead character became amazing in its vividness, accuracy, and demonic fury. The narration carried the piece, moving from righteous indignation to homicidal insanity to death, but some of the scenes were unbelievable.

One could almost feel the fog of a cool crisp London morning in them, and the fear of the dirty drabs lingering on the street could be tasted. It was the murder scenes that were most unforgettable. They had been described in detail, with the appropriate amount of grue. He wasn't sure how he could have remembered the details so fully from books he only barely recalled reading, but every account was perfect, almost too close to reality. The story would be a classic piece of rippermania.

Finally he had something to show all those people who sneered hiddenly when he said he wanted to be a writer, feeling more than hearing

their replies; "Well, yes, but don't you want to do something worthwhile and get a job?" Now he had something to wave in their smug faces, something that he was satisfied with and was too good not to sell.

Something was bothering him. Why the sudden tendency to violence? Why didn't it disturb him more? He had always been against such things and usually tried to be more philosophical in his work. These increasing examples of ultra-violence seemed to wash off him on their way to somewhere else. It was a petty complaint, and worthless in that the stories would have suffered irreparably by its absence, but still it nagged at his conscience. Why did it seem too natural and getting to be much too desirable?

The fury of creation pushed all such thoughts aside. No one would argue details when their heart's desire had been fulfilled. He could write!

From somewhere had come the capacity to make his dream come true, and it was too dear to challenge, whatever form it might take. Why should he care if a few scenes were too much for sensitive eyes, especially when the end result was as astounding as this?

Once again the story was perfect. It looked as though it had stepped whole out of a book, to appear in exact edited form. It was a writer's dream. A complete story in ended perfection, flowing from the machine in one draft; magnificent. The piece was packed off to another magazine, that was certain to accept it, and he started to work again.

He rarely left home anymore. Food was delivered to his door, and all business was conducted through post or telephone. The only time he left his room was to get the mail, that was the only thing important to him. His routine had become one of rising early to write, short breaks for food, typing through the afternoon, a bare minimum of an hour for dinner, with more typing into the small hours of the night.

Since finding the typewriter almost a month ago, he had worked almost continually. Manuscripts filled the desk by the pile, passing out to magazines, only to be replaced by still larger bundles.

To write seemed to be his only function. It was the only thing that made his life bearable, the only thing that mattered. The desire filled his soul even more than before, demanding that he type almost all his waking moments. It had conquered his thoughts and made him its complete

slave.

Ever since the blessed miracle of creation had occurred, his thirst to do more grew greater with each passing second at the machine. He felt that he could no longer stop. Each new finished product left a hunger for the completion of the next. The glorious realization of his artistic dreams were no longer enough. He reached for something more, something slightly beyond his reach.

Each time he started a new story, he delved deeper within himself to find that ingredient that would accomplish his end. Just what he was trying to achieve was unknown, but he felt that his work would be finished once it was completed, and he would be able to rest while looking back at this massive body of work.

The search had affected him. His physical appearance deteriorated, making him appear little more than an animated corpse that clung stubbornly to life; only to write more. The greatest damage had been done inside. Each time he wrote, he grew weaker. It had been a gradual process begun with the first scripts. Now, each new story was harder to finish, more demanding of energy and strength. He put it all down to improper diet, poor sleep, and an almost fanatical devotion to typing. Even when he dreamed, it was of typing that one final piece he tried for each time.

Eventually, the checks began arriving. Every piece he had submitted had been accepted; even the magazines that had rejected him before. All were accompanied with glowing letters, praising the wonderful stories and promising prominent places in the new issues. Tributes began coming in from the editors, who readily ask if he had anything more completed. It didn't matter to him.

The acclaim he had worked for all his life was no longer enough. He had acquired what he had longed for and yet his thirst was not slaked. It was a hollow victory for him as he felt there was something much better, more powerful yet to be done. All the accolades meant little now. His mind was bent on the task of reaching that final plateau, of creating the best thing he would ever do in his pitiful little life.

Soon, he felt, he would write that crowning masterpiece, something that would be the sum total of his existence and for which he would be forever known. The few paltry words of praise he received now would be nothing compared to what would come when he was finished.



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It was a feeling that permeated every fiber of his being, especially when he sat down at the machine. He seemed to know that his final literary victory was almost within his grasp. It was a sensation that greeted him every time he began a new typing session.

Knowing that if he could find that quality hidden in himself, then the work would flow. He didn't know what he would do after that, but he did know that single piece would be unsurpassable by man.

Meanwhile his strength drained as his pile of manuscripts grew. Barely having the energy to eat, he waned considerably. The loss of weight was tremendous, and he looked little more than a fleshy skeleton. But in those eyes surrounded by baggy black skin, a fire burnt that demanded the final task to be completed.

The writing was all that he had and must be done. He believed he would die if he didn't try, and the lure of the machine was damnable.

The last time he sat before the machine, he was but a mere wisp of what he had once been. He knew it was today. His vitality had been drained into the pages of his stories, but the best was yet to come.

The page was inserted and his hands lay poised over the keyboard, wondering if he dare do it. To take the final plunge, all for the love of literature and writing, to finish the challenge he took up when he first put pen to paper. He started to type, draining up what he needed, what he always knew was needed, but was afraid to give up.

The tantalizing perfection of his task danced before his eyes, teasing him with its nearness and its beauty. He knew how to reach it and could no longer resist. It was torture to try, particularly when he saw how easy it was to obtain. The first page came out of the roller, and he knew that it was what he had waited for. Growing weaker as the second and third pages rolled out, he had no idea of what he was typing anymore. He believed it was the culmination of his career. As his eyes grew dim, he worked on, lastly focusing on the black machine bustling with life beneath him.

It was hungry, but sated for a time. This one had been better than most, but lost its life's energy too quickly. Near its thin metal arm, it sensed the large manuscript. It had to use the last shreds of meat to finish the final task, but it was done.

This one had been more productive than it

had hoped for, but was now slumped forward on top of it, burned out. Soon, the flesh would be found and it would be taken away and sold again. It would find another to use, and after that, another, and another. After all, it couldn't push its own keys. It would keep going as it always had, as it always would. It lived to write.



THE BLUE MAN
by
Hugh Danielson

There is something in the dark that is very disorienting.

Christopher Point wondered where he knew this unseen area from. He knew each box and can that tripped him in the darkness. He also knew that the unseen walls on either side of him were windowless and doorless outer walls of rundown houses with far too many tenants. He didn't know where this information came from, he just knew it.

He turned to the left, and saw his first glimpse of light since...When? He didn't know.

The light simply appeared as a gray rectangle. He knew what that dim box signified, but he didn't know why it terrified him.

Christopher could hear his heart pounding and he knew something terrible was going to happen, yet, he couldn't stay away. His feet moved as if by their own volition towards the gray rectangle. He knew it was only a courtyard formed by four of the windowless walls, but if he could, he would run back to the nameless darkness rather than face whatever was about to happen in that small, dimly lit space.

Christopher could now see that the dim light was the partially obscured half moon. By its dark gray light, he made out the figure of a woman lying on the ground. She was between forty and fifty years old, and her plain looking face had obviously never been pretty. Her clothing appeared to be from a style that was popular around the turn of the century. Partially blocking his view of the prone woman was a man in a tweed suit and a bowler hat standing with his back to Christopher.

As he drew nearer, the man turned around and smiled. The man appeared to be one of those old country doctors, also popular at the turn of the century. In one hand, he held a doctor's black bag. In the other was a brown, wiggly field mouse that he gave to Christopher.

Christopher could feel the mouse's heart

beating frantically in fear. Its fragile, rapid beating temporarily obscured his own pounding heart.

Christopher stared intently at the mouse, because, he knew if he didn't, the mouse would somehow change. It didn't make any difference, because he stared the mouse into a passive indifference, much the same you can repeat a word over and over, until it loses its meaning.

By the time Christopher realized his mistake, the mouse was no longer. It was now a human heart beating faintly but rapidly, and its blood was dripping from his fingers.

Christopher looked at the doctor and saw that his face was twisted into a grotesque satanic leer, then he saw the blood and the torn remnants of the woman's blouse. He could tell just exactly whose heart he was holding. He could see just exactly what this kindly looking demon had done to her.

Christopher screamed and screamed, but the sound of his cries were drowned by the laughter of the dark doctor.

Three forty-five A.M. in red digits stared at Christopher as he tugged at the covers on his bed and rolled onto his back.

It was only a dream, he thought.

Yet he knew that this was not the first time he had such a dream. In this dream he knew all of the characters and situations quite well, although, he didn't know what this particular dream was supposed to represent. He also knew that by morning he would have forgotten all about this dream, just as he had on all of the previous occasions.

The late winter sun was setting in gold and red, its light casting long gray shadows up and down the length of Dorrance St.

Christopher was watching the late afternoon shoppers hurrying home in their gray winter coats as he went to the nearby sandwich shop. It was at that moment that he saw him only a dozen feet away.

If Christopher could remember the nightmare he had had the previous night, then he would have been able to recognize the blurred face. The only thing that did happen was that Christopher felt vaguely apprehensive, and these feelings he attributed to the man's otherwise bizarre appearance.

He wore the same tweed suit although Christopher didn't know it. He also wore the same

bowler hat and his expression, however blurred, was that of the kind old country doctor. There were two definitely bizzare features about this man that made Christopher shiver as he watched him.

The first was that Christopher could not get the man into clear focus. Despite the fact that everyone around him was in clear, perfect focus, this man remained a blur.

The second, even more disquieting feature was that the man was entirely blue. On a gold-red winter afternoon when even the gray coats of the shoppers caught the orange light, this man was not only entirely blue in color, but it was as if he were under a blue light. Even his skin and teeth caught this blue light in reflection.

One might expect that the appearance of such a person would attract the attention from passers by, but the late afternoon crowd went sailing by as if nothing out of the ordinary were happening. It was as if the blue man didn't exist at all.

The blue man was talking. Christopher could see his mouth moving, but couldn't hear any sound coming out.

Christopher observed him closer. It was then he realized that the blue man was laughing. He didn't know why that terrified him. He didn't know why he was ducking into an office building to escape the silent ghastly blue laughter. He only knew that he had to get away from it.

Moments later, when Christopher got up enough courage to look out through the building's double glass doors, he saw that the blue man was gone. Instead there was an elderly gray coated shopper wandering around the area where the blue man had been. It was apparent that she had lost something.

Christopher's feet were moving of their own accord. He was walking towards the glass doors, and had to open them to keep from walking into them. He was approaching the woman, his lip trembling and knuckles white. Under his heavy winter clothes, he was perspiring heavily.

"Oh, there it is," the elderly shopper said as he approached her. "Where ever did you find it?"

Puzzled for a moment, Christopher looked into his hands. He was desperately clutching a large voluminous, white handbag. The type one associates automatically with elderly shoppers.

Christopher said nothing as he gave it to her.

"Oh, thank you ever so much," she said as she grinned showing off a set of perfect white teeth. "You really deserve a reward for finding this for me."

He shook his head and walked back across the street to get away from her. He felt he must get away from her.

The anxiety in the pit of Christopher's stomach waxed full bloom. Where did the blue man come from? Why was he so terrified of possession of that pocketbook?

These matters were not helped any by the fact that he could now hear the same woman giving a high pitched, blood curdling scream behind him. It was fortunate that Christopher was too far away to see the expression of disgust on the policeman's face when the woman opened the purse and showed him the contents.

Christopher was certain that his doctor was right. The play was just the thing.

The past week had brought no occurrences of the two previous types, still, Christopher was jittery every time he rounded a corner for he was certain the blue man would be waiting for him. There was never anyone there.

The play had been a good release. Christopher enjoyed escaping into the theatric emotions of the local university's repertory company. Walking up Brown St. towards his car, Christopher had completely forgotten about the blue man and felt no apprehension as the way to his car got darker and darker.

He completely closed his mind to the fact that the houses he was now passing didn't belong on the east side. The houses were getting very run down looking with fewer doors and windows on them. Christopher thought that if this keeps up, there soon won't be any windows or doors on the houses at all.

When he lost control of his feet, he tried to pretend that it wasn't happening.

Christopher didn't remember the dream but he knew that now in the total darkness of the alley, he was more afraid than he could ever remember being. The pounding of his heartbeat thundered in his ears.

He didn't remember the dream, but he was dreading his approach to that gray rectangle of light. From the courtyard, Christopher could hear a deeply resonant crunching sound. It was like the snapping of bone and the tearing of cloth.

There, in a courtyard that was formed by the windowless backs of four tenements, Christopher saw them.

Unaffected by the dim cold light of the winter half moon, he glowed a sickening blue color. A lifeless figure lay on the snow, and there was a red, almost black piece of flesh on the blue man's lips. Blood appearing black, ran down his chin.

Christopher screamed.

When Christopher woke each night to see the barred windows and realize where he was, he became very apprehensive.

Every night his dreams would take place within the same scenario. There were deep woods through which a blue light was traveling. Every night, the light was moving closer and closer to that dark rectangle in the distance that was the asylum. Tonight this unearthly blue light had reached its destination, and was scaling the wall in hopes of getting in. Tonight was different from other nights, the dream was not over when Christopher awoke.

While he was awake, and the rest slept, he could see the blue man at the window calmly sawing away at the bars.

Christopher wanted to scream, but screaming had brought him to this terrible place, and a scream right now would only bring a night nurse with a syringe to help him sleep. He didn't want to go back to that unreal, and far more frightening nightmare world.

The blue man was finished with the window bars and stepped in onto the floor. His hideous blue light illuminated the room making everyone there appear dead and gray. He advanced to each bed in the room, deftly snapping the neck of each occupant with a single sharp motion of his hand.

Finally, he came to the last bed in the room, the one where Christopher lay. He paused with his hand directly over Christopher's neck, and asked that age old question that can never be named.

Christopher knew that if he did not do it, the hand would complete its trajectory as swiftly as it had done for the rest.

He nodded his consent, and it was as if a flame had been extinguished. Immediately, Christopher felt cold. It was a biting and bitter cold. He felt certain that he could last only a few seconds at that freezing temperature. Yet

the cold decreased in temperature, but increased in intensity. Soon, Christopher felt so cold that he was burning.

When he opened his eyes, he saw that indeed he was burning. He was burning with an intensely blue flame. He tried to scream and put out the horrible blue flame, but he couldn't.

Amid the blue flames, Christopher suddenly felt very light. He got out of bed and followed the old country doctor to the window.

Moments later, they were outside the asylum running and flying among the trees of the deeper forest. The black rectangle that was the asylum disappeared over the horizon.

Christopher might have screamed had he looked back at the windows of the asylum. They were locked and unbroken. He could never go back.



THE WAY
by
Thomas E. Sniegoski

Thoughts fragmented in his fevered mind. Oh God, I hurt so much! When will it finish? How could this happen? Sweet Jesus. The whispering...the way... the whispering...

Night had come and the ground was wet. A sudden cooling rain had showered the city while he entertained himself at a downtown pub. Exiting the sleazy establishment, his form was immersed in a moist, damp smelling heat. It was uncomfortably muggy. The brown, three piece clung to him like a loose, second skin. He staggered slightly to one side. Regaining his lost balance with the help of a storefront window, he undid his tie. Again, drink had gotten the better of Thomas Arkham.

Walking with controlled grace, his mind buzzed. What time was it, he wondered. A laugh escaped. Kathleen would definitely be worried, he mused. A vengeful grin slithered across his numbed face. Good, it served the bitch right.

Arkham fumbled at his wrist. His watch was missing. There was a moment of confusion and then he remembered. He had been in such a hurry to avoid another confrontation with her, he had fled from the house leaving his watch in the bathroom. Before his eyes, he saw it sitting on the cold, white, sweating porcelain of the toilet tank, scattered bits of change about its circular form. At least now he had an excuse. "Really honey, I didn't know what time it was, honest!" He laughed out loud and with bitter resignation realized that he would return to her.

His thoughts now filled with her, Arkham pushed forward with no destination. How could she accuse me of such a thing, he thought; making it with Mrs. Holstoy, the English Department secretary! He realized that his marriage was on shaky ground and yes, he was desperate for something new, but not that desperate. An image of Mrs. Holstoy appeared reclining upon a red heart shaped bed, waves of pale flab spreading out on the bed like cooling molten rock. I

have much better taste than that, he reflected. But no matter how disgusting or foolish, this was Kathleen's latest for evolving into the shrieking Irish harpy she actually was.

It wasn't the only problem in his life. The question of tenure haunted Arkham's thoughts each time he entered the small cubicle called an office. Being a professor of American Literature at a large privately owned Boston university during the summer quarter was not one of life's many pleasantries. It was hell. He shook his head. He had had enough of problematic thoughts.

Arkham stopped his mindless wandering and removed his suitcoat. The back of his shirt was drenched. He now knew his destination. His briefcase switched hands and the search for a subway began.

The stifling afternoon heat joining with a cooling downpour helped create a billowing mist that clung to his legs. Plodding along, he gazed down at the swirling, gray mist. Its inconsistency was amazing. It was as if he were transported back to another time, another place. London. He chuckled. The back lot of some two bit movie studio was more like it.

A man stands within the shadows of the next alley. His muscular form presses against the ancient brick wall. He is waiting patiently for someone to come along. The long silver dagger glints in the moonlight. It is as if it pulses with deadly life, an evil all its own. At the next alley, the professor thrust his tensed features into the gloom to face his attacker. The alleyway was dark, litter strewn, and smelled of urine. He laughed at himself and his imagination.

Where is the subway station, he nervously wondered. His pace quickened. He had walked at least three blocks. Stopping, Arkham observed his surroundings. Nothing familiar. He sighed heavily and gave a sweaty shrug of his shoulder.

Feeling slightly drunk and a bit frustrated, he trudged on through the mist covered streets.

It was as if days had passed. Again, he stopped and looked about. Less than an hour ago, he had been standing in front of a Tremont Street bar. Where he was now was a complete mystery. He ran his hand through his hair. It too was wet, a combination of perspiration and the mist. He had lived in Boston or at least the general area most of his life. How could I be lost, he wondered. It was ridiculous, maddening!

On either side they stood, man-made monoliths of orange stone. Stout brick faced buildings resembling factories of the late eighteen hundreds. Large unlighted windows, loomed above him, unseeing and gazing out into the night, like the covered eyes of a blind man. Did a shadow move within, across the path of the window? He cleared his throat and blinked heavily, clearing away the visions. His step quickened.

A creeping tendril of fear probed and found a comfortable place at the base of his spine, causing a wave of tingling gooseflesh to spread across his dampened body. As he gazed about, he grew more nervous. Thomas Arkham realized that he was the only thing alive to grace these darkened streets. He wondered, where was the "way".

The "way" was a term created by his four year old daughter. She would always ask when going on one of their family outings, if they would have to take the "way" to get there. Deep within her simple, little mind, the importance of prefixes, such as sub-, had yet to be realized. Arkham felt that his daughter was quite astute in dropping the word's prefix. Anyone with a bit of intelligence knew it was underground, always there, waiting.

The black capital T hung in the center of the dirty, white plastic. The nesting fear within him retreated, and his heartbeat slowed. Arkham would take just about anything to escape this mist enshrouded neighborhood.

What station was this, he wondered, looking for its name. There was none. If a station name had at one time been visible, it had long ago been covered with the soot and grime of the city and the passing seasons.

He peered down the darkened stairs. Lights burned in the station below. Arkham clutched the wooden railing and feeling it vibrate loosely, carefully began his descent. The bannister was cool and damp to his touch and the stairs barely visible in the dim lighting. The light was supplied by a mud splattered fluorescent that buzzed and flickered as it vainly fought to escape the fate of its gray unlit counterparts.

On the third step from the bottom, Arkham's foot slipped on some slimy debris. With the bannister's help, he regained his lost footing. Someone could easily injure themselves on these littered steps, he thought. Reaching into his trouser pocket, he removed the transit pass. With that magic card of plastic, the roads to art, history, and pornography were travelled

with ease. God, how I hate to pay for the damn thing each month, he brooded.

Pass in hand, he walked to the turnstyle. It was boarded up. The professor looked to his left in search of an entrance. He hoped to God that the station was still open.

Sitting still and quiet within the enshrouding folds of the station was the Starter. He sat upon a wooden stool and looked at Arkham. He was old, with skin like yellowed parchment. Deep set, watery eyes bored into Arkham as he beckoned him past with a skeletal hand. As he passed, that same gnarled hand slowly withdrew a tarnished silver watch from a blue vest pocket. He looked into the face of time and then into the professor's. Thomas Arkham felt suddenly quite cold.

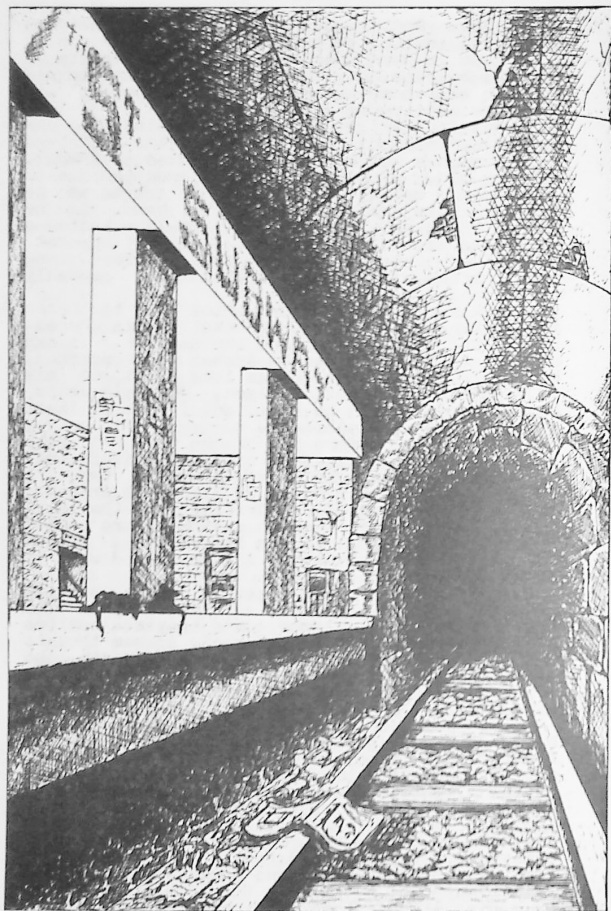
Arkham walked a short brick hall to reach the waiting area. He was ignorant of his whereabouts and destination from the station. It was dim, cavelike. As far as Arkham was concerned, he would travel anywhere as long as it got him away from this forboding place. The next stop, he imagined, would be familiar, if not at least a more pleasant atmosphere.

The area before the tracks was wet with drippings from the ancient cieling. Careful not to be dripped on, he peered into the tunnel's gaping maw. Not a glimmer of light was present. A musty smelling breeze drifted from the dark hole. His skin prickled as another sharp chill made itself at home in his lower back. Arkham put on his suit jacket. All he needed was to catch a summer cold.

Alone and growing edgier with the passing seconds, he looked about. It was a cave. The station was dark, clammy, and tiny stalactites hung dripping from the aged roof. Arkham thought of other catacomb-like stops carved beneath the earth and stone of the city. None had ever looked like this or had such an unsettling effect on him. A primal note of fear had been plucked.

He coughed and shuffled his feet on the hard, stained ground and walked to the platform's edge. Nothing. Not even a stale rustling of air. He shook his head in disgust and peered at the slightly concave wall before him in hope of finding the name of this misbegotten hole. On the wall, barely legible, was the word subway, but the "sub" had been covered in a black slimy substance, that dripped freely from above. Arkham thought of his wife and daughter. The sign said, "way".

His nine-fifteen American Lit class stared



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dumbly at him, their blank faces covered in a glistening sheen of sweat. His topic for that morning had been Poe's use of mood and foreshadowing in his "A Cask of Amontillado". Professor Arkham's attempt at enthusiasm over the macabre aspects of the classic horror piece served only to lull the present student body into a state of fidgeting boredom. Exasperated, initially by his wife and then by the morning's suffocating heat, the middle aged English professor sought his solace in a sleazy Tremont Street bar.

The atmosphere and appearance of the station was appropriate to the day's curriculum. Arkham remembered a piece from the story. Images, voices came to him:

"We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together upon the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montressors."

Arkham chuckled. He felt like a kid remembering a fireside ghost story. He was scaring himself. The place was perfect, he mused, an almost perfect rendition of the story's burial catacombs. Two people whispering in the bowels of the earth. He could practically hear their voices:

"We are below the river bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones." "For the love of God, Montressor!" "Yes," I said, "for the love of God!"

The story's concept caused him to shiver. The thought of being buried alive was a gruesome one. Arkham looked to the station's wall. The image of a rotted corpse dressed in the garb of a court jester suddenly fell from within the stone wall, the corpse's gaping skull covered in a fine shroud of spider's silk. Once again his mind's eye gruesomely assaulted him. He turned his back from the wall and breathed deeply. Too much drink was not good. Arkham panicked. He had to get out of the station. His nerves were on edge, exposed, and practically raw.

He began to pace, all the while taking deep lungfuls of the station's fetid air in hope of relaxing. Occasionally, he glanced up the brick hallway searching for a glimpse of the Starter. Where was the train? Arkham assumed it was a breakdown.

The sudden wave of emotion that he then felt was both surprising and comforting. Arkham was overcome with a feeling of powerful love for

his family. He wanted to take his child, squeezing her until she squealed with delight, and look into her wide trusting eyes as she gave him her love. He wanted to kiss and hold Kathleen to his chest and tell her that everything would be fine. Tenderly, he would whisper in her ear that things would work out. Soon there would be good times again. There was hope.

His eyes welled with burning emotion. Rubbing away the wetness, he knew he could no longer wait in this godforsaken hole. It was late, and his family would worry. They needed him and he them. Arkham's entire body flushed with a feeling of warmth and sobriety. Things no longer seemed so glum. For the last time he came to the tunnel's edge and peered into its opening. Still nothing. With a sigh of exasperation, he turned and began to leave. He would call a taxi upstairs.

The sound came from behind, from deep within the tunnel. Arkham turned and approached the tracks. Perhaps a train had arrived. A sound like steam escaping from an old leaky pipe echoed up from the tunnel's inky darkness. His eyes strained to cut through the murky black. The sound was odd. It would begin softly, grow louder, then taper off to a barely audible whisper. Was it a train, he wondered. A repair crew perhaps?

Something moved up the tunnel, slowly. Cautiously, Arkham stepped closer to the edge. The hissing persisted and grew closer. A new sound joined with the hissing. It sounded as if something wet and heavy were being dragged across the rock covered earth. It grew louder, nearer, the hissing, and the dragging. He was too confused to be frightened. Perhaps some of the false bravado supplied by the evening's indulgence still coursed through his veins.

Something moved in the darkness before him. Neck craned, he peered deeper into the yawning tunnel mouth. A sudden glimpse of movement caused him to recoil. The noises of approach increased in speed as well as volume. Arkham's blood froze. Something blacker than the darkness in the tunnel writhed and grew closer. Carefully, he stepped backward. Whatever it was, it was large and feeling its way up the tunnel's length towards the light and towards him, dragging its large muscular mass behind it. Nausea swept over him in waves as he gazed upon a probing limb. The fluorescent lights above reflected off the massive squirming trunk. Stroking the dampened walls, it left a glistening black residue in its

caressing wake. Arkham tried vainly to blink away the hideous monstrosity before him. It did not fade as the others. It was alive! It was real!

To his utter disgust, Arkham saw that the surface of the limb moved. It was as if the beast's skin had a life all its own. On closer examination, Arkham saw that the tentacle was covered by countless numbers of roach-like insects, each one hissing, and trying desperately to sustain a hold upon the undulating mass. Bile rose in his constricted throat. The tentacle's occasional thrashing hurled the insects to the station floor, stopping their persistent singing only when they hit the hard stone surface. It was one of these plump beetles that gave Arkham the needed incentive to flee the probing monstrosity.

He did not turn his back on it immediately. He began to walk, eyes still fixed on the approaching abomination. As his pace quickened, he now realized, that it was now stroking the surrounding air, searching. The massive limb stood upright, its twitching end bent slightly. It suddenly grew very still. It sensed movement! Arkham ran. A warm trickling sensation engulfed his lower half, almost freezing him in mid escape. When he realized that he had lost control of his bodily functions, he wanted to laugh. Almost.

Arkham remembered another time of intense horror, that same warm sensation. He was six and he and his brother were at a carnival. They were in the House of Horrors. As young Thomas and his brother searched for the exit, they had become aware of another presence. Something followed them. Something evil.

Arkham continued to run. His heart beat painfully at his ribs, as if trying to escape some grisly fate to come. The repulsive sound of its pursuit was louder and getting closer. He could feel the massive limb lopping behind him, its huge mass causing the concrete floor to vibrate beneath his feet. The insects continued their hissing chorus as they fell to the stone floor, scurrying erratically in pursuit of the limb.

He had reached the tunnel's end. It seemed an eternity had passed within the brick faced shaft. His lungs burnt as he took gulps of stale moist air. It was still behind and Arkham could sense its repulsive shape.

The professor ran in search of the old man, the Starter. Perhaps he could do something.

Arkham's eyes found his. They were old eyes. Eyes filled with time itself. He stared, then nodded. Arkham tried desperately to scream a warning to tell the poor old fool to run, but couldn't. Terror had made him mute. The darkened stairs were before him. Perhaps it would run out of reach, he thought with hope. How large could it be? His shoes touched the slime encrusted steps. Arkham began his hurried ascent, arms pumping at his side. He could see light from the entrance to the station.

Arkham fell, his chin hitting the cold wet stairs. Teeth throbbing with pain. He began to rise, attempting to regain his lost footing. Blood had begun to well in his mouth. He spat the coppery tasting fluid onto the stairs. His face ached. The stairs were again beneath him and he pushed forward.

Whip-like, it encircled his lower body, his pant leg riding up slightly. He felt its cold wet flesh press close to his. He grasped for a hold, anything. His clawed hands found the railing. It was damp and brittle within his intense grip. He held on for his life. The insects began to scuttle onto his exposed flesh, a new warm surface, their hissing growing louder, more excited. They sounded happy!

It's true, Arkham thought, about what they say of one's life passing before one's eyes. Something he had never realized was that it would happen so fast. His life seemed so quick, so uneventful.

There was a forceful tug. He held tightly and moaned with the coming of white, searing pain. The insects had begun an exodus up his exposed leg. He felt them beneath his clothing.

The next tug was more violent and he felt his legs pop from their sockets. The tentacle's grip grew tighter. His limbs pulverized. Again it tugged. The bannister began slipping from his grip. There was too much pain. His hold was lost. His chin bounced freely off the stairs he had climbed. He felt the splintering of ribs with the passing of each step. Finally, his body began to numb. The way to freedom, to daylight, grew more and more distant as he was dragged towards the brick hallway.

Arkham dug his fingernails into the stone floor in a futile attempt at halting his abduction. He passed the Starter. The Starter stared and smiled. He stood at the hallway's entrance as Arkham was dragged its length. The Starter searched his pockets and withdrew his watch. Arkham's sight grew cloudy. Leaving a sticky

trail in his wake, he strained to keep his eyes on the ancient figure at the hall's end. The Starter grew smaller, less defined as Arkham was drawn into the beast's lair.

The old man's voice whispered in the darkness as he stared into the face of his pocket-watch and as Arkham was swallowed by the yawning black mouth of the tunnel. The professor thought of everything, his wife, his daughter, his job, this entire hellish incident and the infernal whisperings of the ancient Starter. For the love of God, thought Thomas Arkham through the blinding pain. For the Love of God!

He lay there crushed and broken, in the pitch black, the scent of rot and decay about him, waiting... Waiting for what? He didn't know. His words...The Starter's words reverberated through Arkham's fevered mind. His words. The ancient Starter's murmurings as he stared into the face of his silver pocket-watch. The low whisperings of the words, "Right on time."





SARDINNA84

We hope that you have enjoyed this, our premier issue of HAUNTS. In this and coming issues, we will endeavor to bring you the best in tales of horror, the supernatural, and the unexpected from some of the finest up and coming authors in the country.

The genres of horror and the supernatural have a long and well documented place in American literature, culminating in what has been affectionately referred to as the "pulp." This unique art form has provided a showcase for those who have become some of America's finest fantasy and fiction writers. Lovecraft, Bloch, Ellison, Bradbury. The list could go on endlessly.

Since the demise of the pulps in the 1950's, a void has been created, leaving new and potentially great talent in search of a viable outlet to gain exposure. This is where we feel that we can help.

The pulps were valid as an art form, and are unique to American literature. With the current renaissance of the horror and supernatural themes, we want to help fill that void created by the pulp's disappearance and offer promising new talent the opportunity to gain exposure and confidence in their ability.

We at HAUNTS feel that the ideal vehicle for horror is best expressed by the short story. Properly done, not only is the author given a test of his writing prowess, but the reader is also entertained to a manipulation of his emotions, in which he has little control.

You as our readers, can also participate in this exciting adventure. Feel free to inform us of your suggestions and criticisms as to how we can improve, and in turn, serve you better. Send your correspondence to:

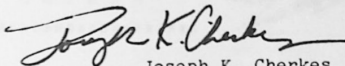
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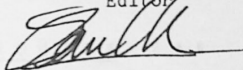
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Names will be held on request. We look forward to hearing from you.



Joseph K. Cherkes
Editor



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Assoc. Editor



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